I AM THE BLACK WIZARDS: MULTIPLICITY, MYSTICISM AND IDENTITY IN BLACK METAL MUSIC AND CULTURE

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ABSTRACT

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Black metal represents one of the most dramatic, violent and obscure representations of contemporary international popular culture; it is an extremist sect of an extremist sect. An understanding of popular culture's most extreme polarities is imperative to an understanding of its range and general character. I will argue that black metal culture is radically different from all other forms of metal and must be understood as a unique form of cultural expression that signifies a dramatic break from both traditional metal and secular modernism. Although black metal has proliferated across the world, taking up certain indigenous variations in its various locations, it has retained three basic characteristics that make it exceptional and significant: 1.) Black Metal is characterized by a conflict between radical individualism and group identity and by an attempt to accept both polarities simultaneously. 2.) Black metal is centered on an extravagantly romantic view of nature and an idealized past, both of these concepts being very much intertwined. 3.) Black metal celebrates the irrational and primal; it is a critique of modern rationalism and secularism.

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Introduction: Enter the Moonlit Gate

I first became aware of black metal through an article in *Spin* magazine in 1996. The *Spin* article told of devil worshiping Norwegians, burning churches and making cacophonous heavy metal music. In those pre-internet days I was unable to obtain any samples of this strange new music, although my fascination with the article stayed in the back of my mind for many years. In the fall of 2000 I discovered a copy of Emperor's *Wrath of the Tyrant* at a local record store in Missoula, Montana where I was an undergraduate and, remembering the band's name from the *Spin* article, I bought the album. My roommate at the time and I listened to *Wrath of the Tyrant* every day for the next year, becoming totally enthralled by the passionate, unique and completely captivating music therein. I have since absorbed as much black metal music and culture as possible, attending concerts, reading books and interviews and occasionally accosting complete strangers in the street who were wearing black metal t-shirts, grilling them for information. This thesis is, in many ways, the culmination of a long-standing fascination with a peculiar outpost of popular culture that most people are totally unaware of.

In 2001 and 2002, I attended a study abroad program at the University of Iceland in Reykjavik and experienced Nordic black metal first-hand for the first time. In 2001 there were numerous wild-eyed black metalers wandering the streets of Reykjavik with Mayhem t-shirts on their backs and self-inflicted scars on their arms. To people from the Nordic countries and Norway in particular, black metal is not a joke. I became friends with numerous Norwegians, many of whom remember all too vividly the days when black metalers were setting fire to every church that they could get their hands on; to these people black metal was something to be hated and feared. In 2005 I traveled to Norway, seeing many of the re-built churches and sites of black

metal activity with my own eyes. I also witnessed the overwhelming beauty of the Norwegian countryside that has provided so much inspiration to Norwegian black metalers. For many Norwegians, black metal is not an absurd manifestation of teenage angst, but rather a national trauma.

Very little academic work has been published on black metal. Prior to Michael Moynihan and Didrik Soderlind's history of black metal, *Lords of Chaos*, which was published in 1998, very few people outside of Scandinavia or the metal community had even heard of black metal. Since the publishing of *Lords of Chaos*, several books have been written that deal indirectly with black metal, but nothing has addressed black metal culture exclusively. Numerous scholars have written books discussing heavy metal culture in a more general sense, but these do not address most of what I will be concerned with in my thesis. I have utilized previous scholarship wherever relevant, but due to the extreme lack of scholarship regarding black metal, I have concentrated primarily on first-hand sources.

While the lack of academic and secondary sources has in some ways made the task of writing this thesis more difficult, this reality has forced me to rely heavily on first hand-sources, which in many ways has proven to be this project's greatest strength. While academics have written very little about black metal, black metalers and metalheads in general, have written a great deal about themselves. Magazines, fanzines, ezines and documentaries within the metal community have provided me with a vast store of interviews and articles to draw from. Major metal magazines like *Decibel* and *Terrorizer* have provided me with invaluable articles and interviews concerning black metal and its inner - workings. The seemingly infinite number of transcribed fanzines and ezines available online have given me incredible amounts of information and insight into black metal culture, although the sheer number of interviews and

articles available online proved to be an intimidating sea of information to sift through. Interviews with black metal scene members offered particularly valuable information; I feel that the importance of allowing scene members to explain their culture and worldview in their own words cannot be over-stressed.

In addition to interviews and articles published in magazines or online, I have spent the last year conducting ethnographic research. I have had the opportunity to interview numerous black metal scene members from countries all over the world, largely through e-mail, but also over the phone and in person. For practical reasons, face-to-face interviews with black metalers in distant parts of the world has not been possible, and in these cases, online interviews had to suffice. That being said, I have found face-to-face or phone interviews to be far more productive and instructive than those done online. The ability to ask follow up questions, probe for elaboration and to comprehend intonation, humor and body language adds a dimension to face-to-face interviews that is unavailable online. I have discovered that for a community of people famous for misanthropy, Satanism and violence, black metalers are remarkably open, helpful and often friendly to someone like myself who is trying to understand their culture and worldview.

I have also had the opportunity to attend several black metal live performances and see the uniqueness and drama that is a black metal concert first hand. In the summer of 2007, I attended an Emperor concert in Chicago that drew black metalers from all over the Midwest, the only other Emperor U.S. dates being in L.A. and New York. I witnessed enormous, brawny men with huge beards and Thor's hammer necklaces. I saw inhuman-looking corpse-painted wraiths slouching in the shadows. I raised my hands, along with everyone else in the theatre, index finger and pinky extended in the metal salute and chanted the climactic ending refrain from Emperor's song *I am the Black Wizards*, "I am them, I am them, I am them!" When confronted

with a large group of black metalers in their element, participating in the culture that makes up at least a large part of their lives and identity, their earnestness and sincerity cannot be easily dismissed.

The conflict between individuality and group identity is one that particularly challenges contemporary culture and black metal in particular. Rhetoric regarding the importance of individualism, self creation, and subjective morality are primary to black metalers all over the world. Some of this rhetoric is borrowed from the Church of Satan, some from the ideas of Frederic Nietzsche, and much from a widely distributed social Darwinist discourse, but all of it attempts to address problems with group identity and the power of the individual that have been significant to much 20th century discourse. This belief in hyper-individuality and subjectivity is problematized by black metal scenic activities that involve bands, scenes, audiences and other undeniably group-centric activities. Black metal culture constantly interrogates this paradox, attempting to reconcile its emphasis on unencumbered individualism with the pleasures and cohesions of the group. This paradox can never be properly resolved, but black metalers attempt to do so through mystical experience. Mystical communion with nature, Satan, one's ancestors or some other abstraction is a central component of black metal culture, ideology and scenic activity. By transcending the physical self, and making contact with the divine, black metalers try to reconcile notions of self and other by dissolving their singular identity with the divine (whatever that may be to any given participant).

It is important to stress that black metal is not a unified, monolithic culture. It takes myriad forms in its numerous locales, scenes and ideological subgenres all over the world. It is also important to stress however, that both musically and ideologically, black metal must be understood as a coherent cultural/artistic framework that only properly makes sense in relation to

its various parts. USNSBM and Nordic Satanic black metal, for all of the differences between these two factions, can only be understood in relation to one another. In my thesis, I will explain the discourses that define black metal, and the symbiotic relationship that exist between opposing factions. Scenic performance, discourse and ideological opposition are vital to black metal culture, and one of the primary tasks of my thesis is to guide the uninitiated listener/reader through these discourse and the identities being created.

It is difficult for many people encountering black metal for the first time to accept that anyone in the developed world in 2008 could believe in things like devil worship, and use something as seemingly absurd as heavy metal as a vehicle for their religious convictions. Many observers with a superficial knowledge of black metal might suggest that many of its spiritual manifestations are simply for show; empty, tongue-and –cheek shock tactics to gain more attention. The years that I have spent being fascinated with black metal have convinced me that this is simply not the case. Black metalers all over the world are engaged in active, on-going projects to instill meaning and identity in their lives. While their project can never remain stable or static, black metalers are constantly negotiating the precarious slope of cultural meaning and authenticity. In my thesis, I will chart many of the methods used by black metalers to create identities that they can believe in.

Chapter One

Cosmic Keys to My Creations and Times: the Birth, Definition and Contextualization of Black Metal Culture

Part One: Introduction

Before dawn on the morning of June 6th, 1992, a small group of young men burned Fantoft stave church, just outside of Bergen on the west cost of Norway, to the ground. Fantoft was built in the 12th century and, until the morning of June 6th 1992, represented one of the most compelling links between Norway's Pagan[1] and Christian eras.[2] The young arsonists were all members of Norway's flourishing black metal scene that had previously received little attention outside of the rather closed world of extreme metal. As the summer of 1992 progressed, it became clear that this was not a random act of violence perpetrated by thuggish adolescents for the sheer enjoyment of seeing a large building burn. The young men in question were devil worshipers. They claimed to worship the devil; some type of corporeal evil apparently in keeping with Christianity's definition. In a series of cryptic press announcements black metal scene members denounced not only Christianity but also "goodness" and the modern world.[3] Over the next few months, even the larger extreme metal community would be scratching their heads and turning a wary eye towards the Norwegian countryside where diabolical activities were apparently afoot.

Over the next several years at least forty-five and perhaps as many as sixty churches were burned by black metal scene members in Norway.[4] Black metal in Norway quickly reached the

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[1] All names that refer to a religious group will be capitalized to avoid giving preference to one group over another.
[2] Moynihan, Michael and Soderlind, Didrik. Lords of Chaos, pgs 81-84. 2003 Feral House.
[3] *Kerrang!* #436, March 27 1993.
[4] Moynihan, Michael and Soderlind, Didrik. Lords of Chaos, pgs 83-84. .

status of a national menace and police frantically attempted to reign in the pyromaniacal young metalheads. The church burnings posed a number of questions: How did a country as wealthy, peaceful and stable as Norway produce a violent, devil worshipping heavy metal cult on this scale? What did they want? Would this start happening in other countries? Why all the face paint and metal spikes? Were they Vikings? What did it all mean? The international metal community was as perplexed as anyone.

Although black metal scene members were both vocal and conspicuous, police were initially confounded as to who exactly was involved in the arsons. The two most famous and often quoted scene members became the focus of much media attention.[5] Øystein "Euronymous" Aarseth was the owner of the extreme metal music shop Helvete[6] in Oslo, guitarist of seminal black metal band Mayhem and founder of the *Death Like Silence* record label. Varg "Count Grishnackh"[7] Vikernes was the sole member of the one man band Burzum,[8] not so coincidentally based in Bergen. While Grishnackh would become infamous for his role in the church burnings and other acts of violence, it was Euronymous who defined much of the early Satanic black metal rhetoric.[9] Euronymous' misanthropic pronouncements and extravagant sense of aesthetics created an evocative backdrop for the unique music the scene was producing. Nordic black metal problematized the distinction between music-based youth culture and fanatic religious cult. It created a culture not only opposed to mainstream politics and religion but also the more abstract notions of rationality, progress and pleasure. It was not necessarily the

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[5] Moynihan, Michael and Soderlind, Didrik, pgs 81-109.
[6] Hell in Norwegian.
[7] The name of an orc in Tolkien's *Lord if the Rings*. Many black metal scene members all over the world have found a great deal of inspiration in Tolkien's work.
[8] Darkness in J.R.R. Tolkien's orc language.
[9] Baddeley, Gavin. Lucifer Rising: Sin, Devil Worship & Rock'n'Roll, Part 3 Chapter 4. 1999 Plexus Publishing.
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Norwegian government or the Lutheran Church that Nordic black metal was attacking but the entire modernist project.

Norwegian black metal had existed for some time before Fantoft went up in flames. A group of fans and musicians had been congregating around Norway for some time and had been crafting a highly unique brand of music, style and ideology that would eventually distinguish itself from all other extreme metal scenes to become something more ideologically driven. Extreme metal fanzines that circulated across northern Europe had been discussing black metal and doing interviews with the Norwegians since the late 80's. In an interview in 1993 with the Finnish fanzine *Kill Yourself Magazine!*, Euronymous pontificates,

> I believe in a horned devil, a personified Satan. In my opinion all other forms of Satanism are bullshit. I hate that some people think up idiotic ways of making eternal peace in the world and dare to call it Satanism, like so many do. Satanism comes from religious Christianity, and there it shall stay. I am a religious person and I will fight those who misuse His name. People are not supposed to believe in themselves and be individualists. They are supposed to *Obey* and be *Slaves* of religion.[10]

This statement is an example of the hard-line, misanthropic devil worship that was popular in the early Nordic scene. While many forms of Satanism, both within and outside of black metal, celebrate individualism and reject all types of dictatorial constraints,[11] many black metalers follow Euronymous' masochistic, misanthropic, anti-individualist ideology.[12] This type of rhetoric was unheard of anywhere in metal prior to Norwegian black metal. Previous metal bands of various types had claimed to be Satanists, but always either of the Church of Satan variety or in some other vague, non-literal way. As Robert Walser argues, metal culture in the eighties had been about power, freedom and control.[13] Norwegian black metal attempted to

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[10] Kill Yourself Magazine! 1993.
[11] Baddeley, 67-79.
[12] Baddeley, pgs 189-212.
[13] Walser, Robert. *Running With the Devil: Power, Gender and Madness in Heavy Metal Music*. Wesleyan University Press, 1993.

break from metal's most fundamental definitions and create new values based in Christianity's most negative polarities. As these ideological foundations grew, changed and proliferated, they would take on myriad forms, while continuing to share a fundamental rejection of modern culture, religion and identity.

Norwegian black metal was also a dramatic musical and visual break from any previous form of metal. While virtually all earlier forms of metal music had emphasized clarity, energy and virtuosity, black metal music is dense, deeply distorted, and cacophonous.[14] Black metal exchanges the guitar solos, technical wizardry and song structure of traditional metal for a buzzing, droning wall-of-sound. Abrasive, meandering and extremely dark, black metal is often completely impenetrable to the casual listener. In certain respects, the early works of Darkthrone, Emperor and Burzum bear closer affinity with the avant-guard soundscapes of Merzbow, Sonic Youth and My Bloody Valentine than with other types of metal. The high operatic vocals of heavy metal and the low grunting of death metal[15] are exchanged for sexless, inhuman, agonized screaming in black metal. The overall affect is claustrophobic, haunting and evocative. A black metal fan whom I interviewed explained his first impression of black metal to me by saying, "The vocals were more shrieking, it wasn't so guttural. Yeah, it was just something different. Something about it just struck a cord."[16] The black metalers with whom I have spoken with often refer to a sense of passion and sincerity in black metal that is not evident in other forms of metal.[17]

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[14] Walser, Chapter Three.
[15] Mudrian, Albert. *Choosing Death: the Improbable History of Death Metal and Grindcore*, pgs 66-77. 2004 Feral House.

[16] 11-01-07
[17] 11-01-07

Black metal's visual style had some precedent in earlier metal but it dramatically re-defined and exaggerated these earlier forms. The black leather and metal studs worn by many segments of the metal community were turned into huge gauntlets with massive pointed spikes by Norwegian black metalers. War imagery like bullet belts, popular in traditional metal, were either exchanged for or embellished with medieval armor and weaponry. Instead of tattoos, brutal self-mutilation scars were often displayed by black metal scene members. Kiss - inspired Halloween-like face paint was transformed into sinister black and white "corpse paint." Capes and long black cloaks were often employed, giving black metalers an evil wizard look.[18] However these outfits might appear to outsiders, we will see that, they are meant to be taken very seriously. The black metal style attempts to altogether deny mundanity, humanity and everyday life in favor of a super-human empowered religious identity that participants feel can provide the meaning that is unavailable to them in mainstream culture. To understand how this transformation occurred we must go back to the birth of metal culture and trace black metal's origins and precedents.

Part Two: From the Dark Past

Rock'n'roll has been denounced by parents and religious groups as the "devil's music" since the earliest days of its existence.[19] Many rock bands of the 1960s flirted with demonic imagery and subject matter, but largely for showmanship.[20] Only a handful of bands from the sixties and early seventies can be said to have directly influenced black metal music and culture. The initiation of both modern Satanism and the precedents of black metal culture began in 1966

[18] See Pictures A
[19] Baddeley, pg 113.
[20] Baddeley, pg 89.

with the founding of the Church of Satan.[21] Although Anton LaVey, the founder and high priest of the Church of Satan, would likely scoff at the suggestion, the Church of Satan was largely a product of the 1960's counter-culture in San Francisco.[22] The Church of Satan adherents were not literal Satanists, but proposed a combination of elitism and vague mysticism as the antidote to Christianity.[23] LaVey's ideas were important to Nordic black metal only insofar as they provided an antithesis of black metal's new brand of Satanism. The Church of Satan and other occult groups of the 1960s did however provide a platform for the Satanic psychedelic bands of the era whose imagery would be influential amongst later generations of Satanic musicians.[24]

The most notable of these was the Church of Satan affiliated band Coven.[25] Coven performed black mass on stage during their concerts and enjoyed the patronage of the Church of Satan. Their music was fairly typical psychedelic rock, with virtually no hint of the metal inclinations that were beginning to show in bands like Black Sabbath.[26] Their stage shows and album art provided an early standard for Satanic metal imagery that would later be developed by various proto-black metal bands.[27] In England, the band Black Widow was dabbling with a similar formula. Black Widow's patron was the British occultist Alex Sanders and, while musically as irrelevant as Coven, they did provide later British Satanists and metalheads with imagery to work with.[28]

Black Sabbath are the most commonly cited example of the first genuine heavy metal band.[29] The heavily blues-influenced rock of bands like Led Zeppelin and Cream was morphed

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[21] Wolf, Burton H. *Introduction to the Satanic Bible*, pg. 13. 1969 Avon Books.
[22] Baddeley, 67-79.
[23] Baddeley, pgs 67-79.
[24] Baddeley, pgs 89-100.
[25] Baddeley, pgs 89-92.
[26] Baddeley, pg 93.
[27] Baddeley, pg 121.
[28] Baddeley, pg 91.
[29] Ingham, Chris. *The Book of Metal*, pg 27-31. 2002 Carlton Books Limited.

by Black Sabbath into a heavy doom-laden dirge. Their subject matter included religion, fear of death and Satan. While, as guitarist Tony Iommi plainly states in the documentary *Metal: A Headbanger's Journey*, Satan and damnation were always treated as subjects of fear and trepidation in Black Sabbath's lyrics, Black Sabbath was indelibly associated with the occult.[30] But, unlike Coven and Black Widow, it was Black Sabbath's musical advances that would prove to be influential among succeeding generations. Black Sabbath combined occult themes with a dark, original sound that set the stage for the rise of heavy metal in the late 1970s.[31]

The rise of heavy metal in the 1970s parallels the development of punk music in a variety of ways. Some early metal bands, most notably Motörhead, were heavily influenced by punk music and played to mixed punk/metal crowds. Motörhead came at a time in both punk and metal culture when boundaries had not yet been clearly delineated and hybridization was still accepted. This combination would be extremely important to the development of extreme metal and its cultural identity. Other metal bands like Judas Priest and Iron Maiden served as a contrast to this hybridization; they defined the term "heavy metal" in a more unique and less punk-influenced way.[32] The production was clean, the vocals high and operatic and the guitars dizzyingly fast and complex. The new wave of British heavy metal would define metal as a specific genre, quite separate from punk, with a powerful driving sound all of its own.

While numerous British bands were defining metal music, one of the largest American rock bands of the seventies was providing the inspiration for what would become black metal's visual style.[33] Kiss' fantastic costumes and demonic personas were undoubtedly the initial stimulus for the "corpse paint" makeup and goblin-esque attire popularized by black metalers a

[30] *Metal: A Headbanger's Journey*.
[31] Baddeley, pg 93.
[32] Ingham, pg 117.
[33] Ingham, pg, 122-123.

decade later. I remember being fascinated by Kiss' album covers and imagery as a child before purchasing a record and being bitterly disappointed with the music therein. While Kiss at no point articulated any interest in Satanism or the occult, worried parents were not so sure. Parents' groups fretted ceaselessly about the possibility of their children dabbling in the occult and asserted that Kiss stood for Knights in Service to Satan.[34] Moral panic aside, Kiss was largely a standard apolitical, areligious rock band with a flare for showmanship.

As the 1970s were drawing to a close, heavy metal was quickly becoming one of the most popular forms of popular music in the world. Heavy metal had come into its own; it had established a clearly unique sound, fan base and cultural attitude separate from both punk and mainstream rock.[35] Metalheads were overwhelmingly male in the late seventies and early eighties and, as Walser explains, masculinity, power and control were the dominating themes of metal culture at the time.[36] While metalheads of the seventies and early eighties were second only to skinheads in their vociferous performance of working class-ness, they remained apolitical and, for the most part, areligious.[37] While quasi-Satanic and occult imagery and subject matter were sometimes employed, this was done in an attempt to emphasize rebellion, freedom and general rowdiness and was not meant to be taken literally. Sex, drugs, rock'n'roll and irritating one's parents were still the order of the day.

A variety of factors and influences came together in the early eighties that would pave the way for the advent of extreme metal, and specifically black metal, in the latter half of the decade. Hardcore punk began wreaking havoc in the United States, making incredibly fast, aggressive music for angst-ridden teenagers to beat each other up to. Bands like the Bad Brains, Black Flag

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[34] Ellis, Bill. *Raising the Devil: Satanism, New Religions and the Media*, pg. 270. 2000 University of Kentucky Press.
[35] Walser, Chapter One.
[36] Walser, Chapter Four.
[37] Weinstein, Chapter Four.

and the Cro-Mags turned the comparatively accessible punk of the Ramones and the Damned into a furious stampede that required the added genre moniker "hardcore." Although early Nordic black metalers announced their unending loathing of hardcore and everything it represents to anyone who would listen,[38] hardcore punk instigated much of what would become extreme metal.[39] Contemporary black metal often admits the influence of hardcore punk, particularly the more thrash - influenced "crust" punk.[40]

Another development was the release of Venom's *Welcome to Hell* album in 1981.[41] Venom took the stripped-down, punk-influenced metal of Motörhead, distorted it even further, and added Satanic themes and imagery. Sharing Kiss' love of over-the-top stage shows and irate parents, Venom crafted an image for themselves as leather clad, heavy metal devil worshipers. This image was an inspiration to later black metal insofar as it attempted to become the embodiment of everything frightened parents groups erroneously accused Led Zeppelin and Kiss of being. They rightly assumed that if vague rumors of Satanism could sell records, unapologetic celebration of Satanism could sell even more. Venom's Satanism was largely a promotional technique and, in spite of how they would be interpreted by certain excitable young Norwegians, they never pretended to adhere to any literal type of Satanism. As Venom's singer Cronos stated to *Kerrang!* magazine in 1985, "I don't preach Satanism, occult, witchcraft, or anything. Rock and Roll is basically entertainment and that's as far as it goes."[42] This statement illustrates a vital difference between earlier forms of metal and Nordic black metal. Black metalers, as we will see, do not dismiss their music and culture as mere "entertainment." Black

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[38] Moynihan and Soderlind, pg 27.
[39] Mudrian, pg 25.
[40] Kahn-Harris, Keith. *Extreme Metal: Music and Culture on the Edge*, pgs 95-96. 2007, Berg Press.
[41] Ingham, pg 230.
[42] Moynihan and Soderlind, pgs 12-14.

metal is ideological, with ambitions regarding the construction and maintenance of personal identities that continue both on and off stage.

Venom is, perhaps, the first example of a phenomenon that would define black metal music: a band with very little money recording music that had been poorly produced and inadvertently creating a very dense, "primitive," highly atmospheric sound. (It is important to note that while Venom coined the term "black metal"[43] they cannot be considered black metal in any contemporary sense of the term. Bands like Venom and Celtic Frost can best be described as proto-black metal and will be referred to as such from this point on.) The cover art on *Welcome to Hell* depicts a pentagram with a goat's head in the center below the Venom logo.[44] Straightforward, unapologetic and unmistakably Satanic, T-shirts depicting this image would become almost required attire for Norwegian black metalers a decade later.[45] Venom also borrowed the punk practice of adopting pseudonyms: Cronos, Mantas and Abaddon. Nordic black metalers would also latch onto this tactic as a method of separating themselves further from their mundane identities and the everyday world. In 1982, Venom released their second album, *Black Metal,* that gave the forthcoming culture its name.[46] Venom influenced black metal culture less by creating unique music or thematic content than by their reinterpretation by a generation of Scandinavians. Norwegian black metal would attempt to take Venom's insincere stage theatrics and make them real.

Merciful Fate, fronted by dynamic singer King Diamond, was also an important fore-runner of black metal. King Diamond's physical appearance and elaboration on Kiss' flamboyant make-up is perhaps his greatest contribution to black metal culture. It is likely that

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[43] Ingham, pg 230.

[44] See picture B

[45] Moynihan and Soderlind, pgs 50 and 68.

Kiss' influence on black metal style was second-hand via King Diamond.[47] Merciful Fate made dark, progressive power metal that, while very experimental for the time, is less of a direct influence on black metal music than Venom or Hellhammer. King Diamond was and continues to be an adherent of the Church of Satan.[48] He would often make up his face with an upside down cross on his forehead; an unambiguous symbol that would be much employed by various extreme metal bands later on. It is important to restate that the Church of Satan does not literally worship Satan but rather uses Satanic imagery as a source of spiritual power and provocation.[49] Merciful Fate were also from Denmark and serve as an early indication that a certain level of Satanic interest existed in Scandinavia.[50]

Hellhammer and their later incarnation Celtic Frost from Switzerland,[51] were probably the most influential proto-black metal bands strictly in terms of music. The clear, fast riffing and solos popular among their contemporaries were exchanged for droning, melodic chord progressions followed by bursts of feral energy. Tom Warrior, as he is known, delivered sharp, low barks that, while they can still be considered traditional singing, hinted at the massive break with "singing" that is characteristic of extreme metal.[52] Celtic Frost also released several promotional photos depicting the band wearing white makeup with black rings around their eyes, apparently designed to make them look dead.[53] While far less extreme than the makeup used by later black metalers, these pictures certainly set a precedent. Hellhammer and Celtic Frost were darker and more experimental than any of their thrash metal contemporaries; they emphasized

[47] Moynihan and Soderlind, pgs 14-15.
[48] Baddeley, pgs 127-128.
[49] Baddeley, Part One, Chapter Six.
[50] Moynihan and Soderlind, pgs 14-15.
[51] Moynihan and Soderlind, pg 26.
[52] Moynihan and Soderlind, pgs 23-30.
[53] Moy Moynihan and Soderlind, pg 36.

atmosphere over speed and technicality.[54] In this sense they represent an early split between the bands that would influence black metal and those that would influence death metal.

Slayer continue to be one of the most popular and respected metal bands in the world and was undoubtedly an early forerunner of death metal. Combining Venom's distortion and "primitive" sound with the speed and intensity of thrash metal, Slayer bridged the gap between more traditional forms of metal and the extreme metal explosion of the late eighties. Slayer also reveled in Satanic imagery more than any other North American band of their time. However, like Venom, Slayer's Satanism was almost exclusively for show and provocation. Singer Tom Araya is, in fact, a professed Catholic and his explanations of his musical forays into Satanism are confusing at best.[55] While Norwegian black metalers would soon be spitting on the ground at the mention of Slayer, denouncing them as "posers," the group's music was undoubtedly influential on the development of extreme metal.

Goth began to emerge as a peculiar outgrowth of punk in the early eighties. Arguably more of a style of dress than any definable musical style, goth has since become wildly popular among mopey, disaffected teenagers all over the world. Although goth bears certain superficial similarities to black metal style, the signifiers add up to very different signifieds in the respective scenes. Where white face-paint often signifies a romantic melancholy in reference to the inevitability of death among goths, it signifies a type of demonic possession among black metalers. Goths frequently transgress gender roles and revel in androgyny, whereas any androgyny in black metal is meant to signify the inhuman and grotesque rather than gender transgression. Goth largely celebrates a romantic morbidity; black metal celebrates evil, violence, pain and hatred. The visual similarities between the two cultures are misleading; the

[54] Moynihan and Soderlind, pg 26.
[55] *Metal: A Headbanger's Journey*

two groups are wildly different in tone, ideology and ambition. Goth music, if we can speak of goth music as a distinct genre, bears very little similarity to black metal, and the differences in music give a casual indication of the profound differences between the two groups in a more general sense. Black metalers are frequently insistent that black metal has nothing to do with goth, as Irish black metaler A.A. Nemtheanga articulates: "I don't think black metal has anything to do with goth."[56] If nothing else, black metalers are extremely averse to the suggestion that black metal has cultural connections with goth.

Part Three: Scream Bloody Gore

In 1983 a fourteen year-old Swedish boy calling himself Quorthon began making music under the name Bathory. Bathory's earliest recordings appeared on various metal compilations that circulated through the tape-trading circuits of Europe. The sound of these recordings is far beyond the distorted gritty sound of Venom; Bathory's early recordings are a buzzing, wailing miasma of noise. Like Venom, much of this early sound was due to poor production techniques rather than artistic vision, but the result was the same regardless of the initial intention: an unprecedented leap forward for extreme, experimental metal.[57] Bathory's 1985 full length *the Return* sounds like nothing else that had been released before it. Quorthon's vocals ranged from a high wailing shriek to a low croaking moan. Bathory's vocals are one of the earliest examples of the departure from traditional singing that would characterize extreme metal in years to come. Around the same time in the United States the band Death was experimenting with a low barking style of vocals that would give birth to the "death growl" style of vocals popular in death metal,

[56] Zebub, Bill. *Black Metal: A Documentary*.
[57] Moynihan and Soderlind, pgs 16-22.

but nothing at that time sounded anything like the unholy caterwauling that Quorthon was inflicting upon his listeners.[58] Gritty, droning and acerbic, *the Return* and its successor *Under the Sign: the Sign of the Black Mark* gave birth to black metal as we know it and were the principle inspiration for the music that would emerge from the Norwegian scene.[59]

Bathory were nearly as influential upon later black metal visually as they were musically. Taking classic elements of traditional metal style like bullet belts and leather, Bathory removed the more "human" aspects and amplified others to create a militaristic, fantastical visual style that invoked the Viking age as much as it did heavy metal culture. An early Bathory promotional picture shows Quorthon wearing a cut-off Bathory t-shirt, bullet-belts, metal studded leather straps across both forearms and a large necklace made of what appear to be bones.[60] Quorthon has his head tilted back and is exhaling a mouthful of alcohol into a massive torch that he is holding in his upraised right hand to create a "breathing fire" effect. The picture takes place at night with a forest visible in the background. Quorthon appears to be some type of feral barbarian creature performing an ancient ritual deep in the forest. The overall effect of this picture, and the fire-breathing pose in particular, would become classic, standardized black metal iconography in years to come and would be imitated by virtually all of the Norwegian bands.[61] This image of the neo-Viking warrior emerging from the forest primeval is one of the most imitated and evocative of all black metal images. Black metal is fixated with notions of a romantic past and the vital, empowering identities that they believe are available through pre-modern and pre-Christian culture. Bathory were the first band to properly articulate this idea visually, creating an early example that would be much imitated later.

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[58] Mudrian, pg 73.
[59] Moynihan and Soderlind, pgs 16-22.
[60] See Picture C
[61] See Picture D

Bathory provided the inspiration for both of the two main musical and ideological branches of Norwegian black metal. Their early work inspired the early Satanic Norwegian bands like Mayhem and Darkthrone.[62] *The Return* and *Under the Sign* were thematically Satanic, although it is difficult to assess Quorthon's sincerity due to his extremely young age and later dismissal of Satanism.[63] It seems likely that Bathory's early dabbling in Satanism was similar in character to Venom's; a means of shocking outsiders and titillating insiders. The dense, echoey, wall-of-noise sound presented on Bathory's first two releases created the black metal template that Mayhem and Darkthrone later expanded on. Bathory did not stick with this early style, however, and their musical endeavors in the late eighties would inspire the Viking metal sub-genre of black metal popularized by bands like Enslaved and Einherjer.

Bathory's Viking trilogy *Blood, Fire, Death* (1988), *Hammerheart* (1990) and *Twilight of the Gods* (1991) abandon the Satanism of their predecessors in favor of an exploration of old Norse mythology. The Viking trilogy was a huge departure from Bathory's earlier releases both musically and thematically. Low-fi production techniques are exchanged for clear, atmospheric production that highlights the albums' epic, symphonic qualities. Quorthon's malevolent wail of earlier releases is replaced with clean, chanting vocals. Acoustic guitars are included in the mix, something nearly unheard of in the extreme metal of the time, as were flutes and Bathory's signature group-chanting vocals. While this musical shift was a departure from Bathory's earlier style, and numerous metal bands all over the world would be influenced by it in years to come,[64] it was Quorthon's interest in the Old Norse Gods[65] that marked a significant change both in Bathory as a band and in extreme metal's perception of itself. Nordic metal, largely due to the

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[62] Compare Bathory's *the Return* to Darkthrone's *A Blaze in the Northern Sky*
[63] *Kerrang!* 1990, Paul Miller interview.
[64] Kahn-Harris, pgs 105-107.
[65] *Grimoire of Exalted Deeds* #7.

pioneering work of Bathory, would establish a unique sense of itself and its place in the international metal scene during the 80's that would culminate with Norwegian black metal and the Swedish extreme metal scene of the 90's.[66] This thematic and ideological transformation marked a shift among certain elements of the metal world away from insincere provocation and showmanship and towards sincere, often fanatic religious belief mixed with elements of nationalism.[67]

Apart from Bathory, there were other experimental rumblings coming from Sweden's metal scene in the late eighties. Stockholm became a fertile breeding ground for what was gradually becoming known as death metal. Inspired by a combination of hardcore punk and American thrash metal, Swedish bands like Grave, Nihilist and Entombed began to form.[68] As Natalie J. Purcell explains, death metal took the speed, technicality and aggression of thrash metal bands like Possessed and Slayer, tuned down the guitars, sped up the drums and added the low, guttural, grunting "death growl" vocals that characterize the style. Death metal retains the guitar solos of earlier forms of metal, although they take a back seat to the numerous "riffs" that make up the backbone of a death metal song. Often abandoning traditional "verse-chorus-verse" song structure altogether, death metal songs are frequently unpredictable and meandering affairs that are far less accessible to the uninitiated ear than earlier forms of metal. Very little melody is evident in death metal, which focuses instead on speed, technicality, density and aggression. Death metal attempts to achieve what is often described as "brutality" amongst scene members, a

[66] Mudrian, Chapter 4.
[67] Moynihan and Soderlind, pgs 20-22.
[68] Mudrian, Chapter 4.

term that seems to refer to an unrelenting, angry, overpowering quality that is the antithesis of the pretty, melodic glam metal that was popular at the time.[69]

Very few of these bands had recording contracts with wide distribution, making the international tape-trading circuit vital to the proliferation of extreme metal. As Albert Mudrian describes in his history of death metal and grindcore, *Choosing Death*, scene members in the United States could become pen-pals with scene members in the U.K. through fanzine postings and could copy and trade tapes of local bands from one scene in the U.S. for tapes of local bands from another scene in the U.K. As extreme metal at this time was not looked upon as a viable commercial prospect by most record labels, tape trading was virtually the only way for fans to hear new music. This practice allowed musical breakthroughs or advances from one scene to travel to another scene and influence people half a world away without any intervention from record companies or anyone outside of the scene being aware of the music being produced.[70]

Other than Stockholm, there were two major scenes that were instrumental in the advent of death metal: Florida in the U.S. and Birmingham, England. In Florida, bands like Morbid Angel, Death and Obituary were taking thrash metal to another level of speed and "brutality." The low, barking "death growl" style of vocals was perfected in Florida as was the clean, crisp production sound characteristic of numerous Florida bands.[71] Thematically, death metal was also several steps beyond anything attempted by earlier forms of metal. Themes of damnation, supernatural horror and graphic mutilation were commonplace, providing a fitting foreground to the extremity of the music. Lyrics to the song *Edible Autopsy* by the Florida-based death metal band Cannibal Corpse go as follows:

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[69] Purcell, Natalie J. Death Metal Music: the Passion and Politics of a Subculture, Chapter One. 2003 McFarland & Company.
[70] Mudrian, Chapter Two.
[71] Moynihan and Soderlind, Chapter Three.

Guts and blood, bones are broken
As they eat your pancreas
Human liver for their dinner
Or maybe soup with eyes
Cause of death, still unknown
Gnawing meat, from your bones
Bone saw binding in your skull
Brains are oozing a human stump
Needles injected, through your eyes
Pulling off flesh, skinned alive[72]

As Cannibal Corpse singer Chris Barnes illustrates in this passage, death metal is fascinated by the violent and grotesque. The music evokes intensity, power and hyper-masculinity. As Keith Khan-Harris describes, death metal of this kind is an attempt to confront and overcome one's fears of death and the supernatural; it is a means of catharsis rather than spiritual expression.[73]

Although Norwegian black metalers frequently denounced the Florida death metal scene as being comprised of "trends" and "posers,"[74] Morbid Angel were often the exception to the rule. Although Morbid Angel were one of the earliest Florida death metal bands, their sound, aesthetics and thematic interests are somewhat different from other bands in the scene. Their sound was grittier and darker than other Florida death metal, betraying an appreciation of Celtic Frost and Venom. Their look also tended to veer more towards leather and spikes than other Florida bands who preferred the "stoner next door" look that was much derided by the Norwegian scene.[75] Morbid Angel's album art and lyrical content focused on the occult and

[72] Cannibal Corpse. *Eaten Back to Life, Edible Autopsy*. 1990, Roadrunner Records.
[73] Khan-Harris, Chapter Two.
[74] *Beat Mag* #2
[75] Moynihan and Soderlind, pgs 28-32.

supernatural rather than the zombie-splatter movie inspired lyrics and album art of Obituary and Cannibal Corpse.

Birmingham, England was the third and perhaps most important of the death metal breeding grounds.[76] Birmingham in the late eighties was instrumental in producing both early death metal and its more hardcore influenced cousin, grindcore. Grindcore took the politically oriented hardcore of the time and sped it up almost beyond endurance. Napalm Death were the earliest and most famous grindcore band, creating very short, intense songs that were often twenty or thirty seconds long.[77] Grindcore songs are brief bursts of anger and energy, often with a left-wing political agenda and one foot planted squarely in the hardcore scene. Carcass and Bolt Thrower were Birmingham death metal bands who also included leftist political ideology in their music. Religious themes were rare in the Birmingham scene and the aesthetics of these bands was virtually identical to that of the hardcore bands popular at the time.[78] During the early 90s, the Norwegian scene denounced the Birmingham scene as "posers" and "humanists," the two harshest criticisms in their lexicon.[79]

Although death metal and grindcore were very extreme musically, they were not dramatically different from earlier music-based youth cultures in terms of self-perception, ideology and ambition. Grindcore was an outgrowth of hardcore punk; its politics, visual style and inclination towards community were almost exactly the same.[80] Hardcore and grindcore were a response to the frustration caused by the unemployment, racism and cultural stagnation of Thatcher's Britain.[81] Bands like Napalm Death and Extreme Noise Terror took hardcore music

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[76] Mudrian, Chapter One.
[77] Mudrian, Chapter One.
[78] Mudrian, Chapter One
[79] Moynihan and Soderlind, pgs 36-39.
[80] Mudrian, Chapter One
[81] Mudrian, pg 25.

and condensed it to its basic elements without tampering with its basic cultural framework. Death metal attempted a similar feat in the United States; it amplified thrash metal, both musically and aesthetically, without changing its basic structure. Insofar as death metal was interested in Satanism, it was an interest based on provocation and rebellion rather than spirituality.[82] The gore-oriented death metal bands were discussing death and horror as a means of confronting and overcoming them. Satan, zombies and serial killers are all lumped into the same category in death metal.[83] Death metal and grindcore can both be understood to be part of the modernist project with ambitions towards equality, freedom and progress; things the Norwegian black metal scene define themselves in opposition to.

Black metal is a very different creature. Although its roots are certainly in traditional heavy metal culture, by the time of its maturity it had morphed into a volatile combination of religious fanaticism, nationalism and misanthropy. Humorless, militant and uncompromising, black metal abandons the fun and theatrics of other types of metal in an attempt to create extravagant identities designed to operate outside of mundanity and everyday life. When death metal bands discuss horror and mutilation, it is meant to be enjoyable; a type of audio horror film.[84] Black metal songs are meant to be like Calvinist sermons; deadly serious attempts to unite the true believers under the twin banners of Satan and misanthropy. Borrowing the evocative imagery of Venom and Merciful Fate, black metal contextualizes these images within a very different framework that strips them of their intended Halloween-esque qualities and infuses them with the single-mindedness of sincere religious conviction and apocalyptic millenarianism. As Walser describes, most kinds of metal are about power, control and the

[82] *Metal: A Headbanger's Journey*.
[83] Kahn-Harris, pg 29.
[84] Moynihan and Soderlind, pgs 28-29.

performance of masculinity.[85] Norwegian black metal attempts to abandon mundanity altogether in favor of a super-human, essentially spiritual identity tied to the ancient past and the deity being invoked.[86] Destruction of the self and the loss of control are, as we will see, fundamental themes in black metal culture. Early Nordic black metal rejected the individual subjectivity and rationalism of modernity and attempted to retrieve something primal and invigorating that they believed existed in the distant past. Since the early 90s, black metal has factionalized dramatically, creating pockets of black metalers who are interested in hyper-subjectivity and others that retain the early scenes' interest in destroying humanity and subjectivity through communion with Satan. This ongoing conflict between notions of self and other, between the group and the individual, and a highly problematized notion of subjectivity, continue to characterize much of black metal culture and ideology

Part Four: With Strength I Burn

Unlike the aforementioned death metal and grindcore bands, the Norwegian scene that began to coalesce in the late 1980's was sincerely and overtly religious. They were religious in the sense that they had a specific religious/ideological message that they felt was the focal point of their music and the culture they were attempting to establish and propagate. Rather than the secular/humanist critique of Christianity espoused by the Church of Satan,[87] many members of the Norwegian scene, or "black circle" as it came to be known, worshiped a literal, corporeal

[85] Walser, Chapters 3 and 4.
[86] Kahn-Harris, pgs 59-67
[87] LaVey, Anton. *The Satanic Bible*, pgs 40-43. Avon Books 1969.

Satan and accepted the Christian claim that Satan represents fear, hate and evil.[88] Euronymous explains his relationship with Satan:

> I am commanded by Satan. We are all just servants of Satan and we don't expect anything in return. We don't expect to be rewarded with pleasure or riches or anything- its just horror and Hell that we will receive. As to what happens to me-it doesn't matter-as long as I can take as many with me as I can.[89]

Euronymous, his band Mayhem and other key figures in the scene would transform Venom's quasi-Satanic stage theatrics into a form of cultural expression unique from other forms of metal or Satanism. The early Nordic scene often suggested that they had no interest in making the world a better place or alleviating suffering; on the contrary, they asserted a desire to increase human suffering.

Euronymous was the central figure involved in the formation of the Norwegian black metal scene. He established the look, sound and philosophy of the Norwegian scene and black metal as it exists today would not have existed without Euronymous.[90] In their history of black metal *Lords of Chaos*, Moynihan and Soderlind write, "The principle elements of black metal in Norway reside as much in belief and outlook as they do in the music itself….the genre is in many ways entirely defined by the dramatic personalities who have comprised it and continue to forge its destiny."[91] Euronymous was the most significant of these "dramatic personalities" and set the tone early on in Norway for black metal's sense of itself. Inspired by Venom, Hellhammer and Bathory, Euronymous formed Mayhem in 1982 in order to carry on the "true" spirit of black metal. Mayhem released their first demo, *Pure Fucking Armageddon*, in 1986.[92] During this period Mayhem and other Norwegian metal-heads around them began to diverge

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[88] See Gavin Baddeley's interview with Euronymous. *Lucifer Rising*, pg 205.
[89] Baddeley, pg 204.
[90] Moynihan and Soderlind, Chapter Three.
[91] Moynihan and Soderlind, pg 33.
[92] Moynihan and Soderlind, pg 35.

from traditional forms of metal stylistically and ideologically, taking Venom's theatrics and turning them into religious rituals and representations.

During the late eighties, Euronymous, through both musical and ideological experimentation, began isolating the Norwegian scene from the international extreme metal scene. Although Mayhem was unable to produce more than a few poorly produced demos and EPs, mostly due to financial difficulties, their cult following within the Norwegian extreme metal scene began to grow and change.[93] Bands like Napalm Death and Entombed became quite popular internationally, a development Norwegian black metal enormously resented. Euronymous explains his feelings about black metal's constituency and its relationship with the rest of the metal world:

> Black metal is so extreme that not anyone can get into it. This isn't a fun hobby which stupid kids shall have after they comes home from school. It has always been a lot of cliques in metal and not even the metal society has taken it seriously. When it then comes someone who is serious about what they are doing, everyone is shocked. Black metal is meant to be serious, not because other shall take us seriously, but because we are serious. It is talk about religion and we praise the evil and believe blindly in a god creature just like a Christian.[94]

Euronymous distinguishes black metal from other forms of metal, other forms of Satanism and especially all forms of mainstream culture.[95] Beginning in the late 80's and coming into full flower in the early 90's, Norwegian black metal abandoned the mundane identities and ambitions of other forms of metal in favor of religious and ideological fanaticism.[96]

Norwegian black metal is largely defined by opposition; they only exist in reference to what they are opposed to. The early Norwegian scene adopted an essentially negative worldview that rejected all notions of pleasure, happiness and positivity. Black metalers of the late eighties

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[93] Moynihan and Soderlind, pgs 45-62.
[94] *Beat* fanzine #2
[95] Kahn-Harris, pgs 59-66.
[96] Moynihan and Soderlind, Chapter Three.

and early nineties would often reject presumptions of cohesion within the scene, claiming that they were not friends but only partners or allies with similar goals. Euronymous explains, "I have no friends, just the guys I am allied with. If my girlfriend dies I won't cry, I'll misuse her corpse."[97] While this statement does not seem to be strictly true (there were friendships and loyalties within the so-called "black circle"), it does reflect a tendency towards misanthropic introspection. Bombastic statements of the kind quoted above should be read as within-the-scene performance rather than simply attempts to attain publicity and record sales for Mayhem. At the time of this interview Norwegian black metal was virtually unheard of outside of Scandinavia and was very underground within Scandinavia. Mayhem had released only their *Pure Fucking Armageddon* demo and their *Deathcrush* EP at that time, and those recordings were virtually unavailable due to the very limited pressing they received. Statements like the one quoted above must be understood to be sincere inter-scenic performances, designed to establish an ideological framework and attain subcultural capital and not simply opportunistic attempts to boost record sales.

Kahn-Harris discusses the ways in which boundaries and definitions based on opposition to an outside group are essential to the formation of identities among extreme metal subcultures of all types.[98] Acts of self-mutilation, violence against others and arson, as well as the general misanthropy espoused by Norwegian black metal, were extreme attempts to draw the kinds of social boundaries around their scene that Kahn - Harris describes. In one of the few interviews given by Mayhem singer Dead, he describes the crowd's reaction when he began severely cutting himself on stage and throwing severed pigs heads, entrails and blood into the crowd during a show,

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[97] *Beat Mag* #2
[98] Kahn-Harris, pgs 54-67

We wanna scare those who shouldn't be at our concerts and they will have to escape through the emergency exit with parts of their body missing, so we have something to throw around. Black metal is something all ordinary mortals should fear, not make into a trend. They got pissed off at our shows and that is what we want. If someone doesn't like blood and rotten flesh thrown in their face they can *fuck off*, and that's exactly what they do.[99]

Dead's distaste for "ordinary mortals" at Mayhem shows is typical of black metal's methods of scenic construction. Black metal from the formative days of the Norwegian scene was obsessed with the denunciation of "trends" and "posers."[100] Authenticity within the scene was defined in opposition to outside groups, most significantly death metal, grindcore and hardcore.[101] The violence, devil worship, neo-Nazism/totalitarianism, and misanthropy that defined Norwegian black metal in the late eighties and early nineties was an attempt to cut the scene off from other scenes and subcultures; to create impregnable walls around their scene and identities that could not be corrupted.

Black metal came into its own in the early 90s, going through a dramatic burgeoning both musically and ideologically.[102] The early 90s was a period of fanaticism, violence and growth. Contemporary international black metal looks back on this period reverently as a model of sincerity and authenticity.[103] In 1991 Darkthrone released *A Blaze in the Northern Sky* which set a standard for low-fi, no frills black metal. Emperor released *Wrath of the Tyrant* in 1992, utilizing keyboards and melody in a highly effective way. Burzum, Gorgoroth, Ulver and Immortal also emerged during this period,[104] each with a unique take on the Norwegian black metal sound. It was, however, the actions and ideology of Norwegian black metal that would set them apart and establish their unique culture and identity.

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[99] Mega Mag translated by Kai Mathias Stalhammer. www.rusmetal.ru/vae_solis/mayhemint.htm
[100] Moynihan and Soderlind, pgs 33-45
[101] Moynihan and Soderlind, pgs 69-78.
[102] Moynihan and Soderlind, Chapter Three.
[103] Zebub, Bill. *Black Metal: A Documentary*.
[104] Moynihan and Soderlind, pgs 63-78

The suicide of the aptly named Mayhem vocalist Dead (as well as the discovery, photography and alleged cannibalization of his corpse by Euronymous) has become the stuff of Black Metal legend in the years since Euronymous' murder. Euronymous describes the discovery of Dead's body:

> I'm not into this business for *fun*, so of course I was not scared. It's not every day you get the chance to see and touch the real corpse. And it's important to learn one thing when you are dealing with the dark side: there is *nothing* too sick, evil or perverted. Dead wanted to make evil music for evil people, but the only people he saw were walking around in jogging suits, caps and baseball shoes and being into peace and love.[105] He hated them so much, and saw no reason any longer to waste his time on them.[106]

After Euronymous found Dead's body he apparently purchased a camera and took pictures of Dead's corpse, using the photos for the cover of a forthcoming EP.[107] Drummer Hellhammer recounts his phone conversation with Euronymous shortly after Dead's suicide:

> Euronymous called me and said, 'You can't go back because the police have closed the house.' 'Why?' I said. 'Because Dead has gone home.' 'He went back to Sweden?' I asked. 'No. He blew his brains out.' Euronymous found him…with half his head blown away. So he went out and drove to the nearest store to buy a camera to take some pictures of him.[108]

The obsession with death, morbidity and violence, like the rejection of happiness and friendship, can best be understood as an attempt to obtain subcultural capital rather than record sales. Respect within the scene was the primary motivation for behavior of this kind, coupled with a sincere attempt to build dramatic, transgressive identities.

Up to this point in the narrative of Dead's suicide, there is little contestation of Euronymous' version of the story; however, the truth of the next stage of the story is less clear. Faust, drummer for the band Emperor and friend of Euronymous, explains, "He took the brain

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[105] This is a reference to people involved with Death Metal who were wearing these types of clothes at the time.
[106] Kill Yourself Magazine #2
[107] See Picture E
[108] Moynihan and Soderlind, pg 49.

pieces and made necklaces and ate part of the brain."[109] The statement about the necklaces seems to be true, as numerous people within the scene attest to having seen them years after the fact when more sober accounts were given. It is impossible to know for sure if Euronymous actually ate parts of Dead's brain or if this was simply another attempt to seem more "evil" within the scene. The truth of the matter is perhaps unimportant in light of the fact that people within the scene, as well as people in other black metal scenes all over the world in the years that followed, believed the story and continue to speak of it in tones of reverence and respect.[110] The tale of Dead's suicide and Euronymous' photography and cannibalism has become the stuff of black metal folklore, representing (along with the church burnings) the embodiment of black metal ideology, authenticity and sincerity.

Shortly after Dead's suicide, the church burnings began. It is impossible to ascertain exactly how many churches were burned during the 90's in Norway as the Norwegian police have kept the exact numbers secret in order to discourage copy-cat arsons and to keep public panic to a minimum.[111] Although Varg Vikernes was never convicted for the Fantoft burning, he is strongly suspected of being responsible for it.[112] Sjur Helseth, head of the technical department of the Norwegian Directorate for Cultural Heritage, states that roughly one third of the thirty-five to sixty churches burned during the early 90's have documented links to black metalers.[113] The church burnings marked a vital step for Norwegian black metal away from the playful theatrical identities defined by other forms of metal and towards the violent, uncompromising, irrational identities they were attempting to construct for themselves. Norwegian black metal was attempting to communicate to the international metal community,

[109] Moynihan and Soderlind, pg 55.
[110] Moynihan and Soderlind, pgs 53-62
[111] Moynihan and Soderlind, pgs 83-84
[112] Moynihan and Soderlind, pgs 92-94
[113] Moynihan and Soderlind, pg 83

the local population and most importantly themselves that they were serious in their acceptance of "hatred" and "evil," that they had discarded the insincere identities they associated with death metal in favor of the real thing.[114]

Three members of the seminal Norwegian black metal band Emperor were convicted of church burnings[115] and their drummer Faust was convicted of murder, an act he committed in a highly ritualistic way against a complete stranger.[116] Emperor's singer and lead guitarist, Ihsahn, explains what church burnings meant to him at the time: "Burning churches was a symbolic act, and it proved that some people in Norway were very much against Christianity. It underlined and strengthened my individual feelings. It was one step further away from normal daily life for me, and for many people."[117] Ihsahn's statement about the burnings being "one step away from daily life" is very telling; it indicates black metal's desire to abandon mundane identities in favor of something more spiritually and emotionally potent. In a different interview, Ihsahn states: "Black metal tried to concentrate more on just being 'evil.' Everyone took it very seriously, but it's hard to live up to those ideals. It's hard for anyone to be as evil and as hateful as the ideals the black metal scene had. All of us tried in a way…"[118] While it is not surprising that Norwegian black metalers find these extreme, volatile identities difficult to maintain, particularly behind bars, their attempt to do so is ambitious and ongoing.[119]

The early 90s was the defining period for Norwegian black metal and black metal as a whole. Norwegian black metal attempted, with some success, in the early 90s to become the blood-drinking, ritual-sacrifice performing devil worshippers that parents and religious groups

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[114] Baddeley, pgs 191-196
[115] Moynihan and Soderlind, pgs 99-105
[116] Moynihan and Soderlind, pgs 98-99.
[117] Moynihan and Soderlind, pg 102
[118] Moynihan and Soderlind, pg 218
[119] Zebub, Bill. *Black Metal: A Documentary*.

had been mistaking bands like Alice Cooper, Iron Maiden and Kiss for since the advent of rock'n'roll.[120] Norwegian black metal wanted to become, as Sam Dunn puts it, "the real thing."[121] In Sam Dunn's documentary, *Metal: A Headbanger's Journey,* Monte Conner of the established metal label Roadrunner Records describes black metal's divergence from traditional metal representations of Satanism: "Some people believe in it. I'm not going to deny that the Norwegian bands are real. They've proven they are real by their actions."[122] Norwegian black metal attempts to provoke exactly the type of reactions that Conner provides; they were attempting to exemplify the sincerity, mystery and romance they felt was lacking in the modern world.

On August 10th 1993, Varg Vikernes stabbed Euronymous to death outside of his home in Oslo.[123] The murder was apparently a result of a squabble over money that Euronymous and his label Death Like Silence owed Vikernes, although tensions regarding dominance in the black metal scene between its two most prominent members were also likely a factor.[124] Whatever Vikernes' exact motivations might have been, the murder, along with the church burnings and other acts of violence, has become part of the legend of Norwegian black metal in spite of the fact that Vikernes' murder of Euronymous seems to be totally mundane in character with no religious or ritualistic undertones.[125] Vikernes has since retired to a Norwegian maximum security penitentiary where he has reinvented himself as a neo-Pagan neo-Nazi.[126] In many ways, Euronymous' murder marked the high-water mark for extremism and violence in the Norwegian black metal scene. The investigations surrounding the various murders and arsons

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[120] Baddeley, Part Two, Chapter Four.
[121] Dunn, Sam. *Metal: A Headbanger's Journey*.
[122] Dunn, Sam. *Metal: A Headbanger's Journey*.
[123] Moynihan and Soderlind, pg 117.
[124] Moynihan and Soderlind, pgs 122-144
[125] Moynihan and Soderlind , pgs 124-128.
[126] Vikernes' religious and political positions will be discussed more in Chapters 3 and 4.

began to bear fruit for the Norwegian police, and numerous black metal scene members were imprisoned, including three of the four members of Emperor. While black metalers continue to commit ritualistic acts of violence today,[127] the widespread violence prevalent in the early 90's was largely under control by 1995.[128]

In the years since the church burning era, black metal has proliferated across the globe.[129] Famous for incorporating indigenous folk music into its repertoire,[130] black metal takes on a unique flavor influenced by the specific culture it finds itself in. Although black metal, like any other underground form of music that receives sufficient notoriety, has been repackaged and re-sold to a wider audience by bands like Cradle of Filth and Dimmu Borgir, it continues to become more experimental both musically and ideologically in more obscure circles like the French, Ukrainian and U.S. underground scenes. Euronymous popularized his brand of devil worship during the early 90s and this perspective is still prevalent today, although black metal has diversified tremendously in terms of its spiritual outlook and ideology. Norwegian black metal created a framework for what would become international black metal; a phenomenon that retains many of the basic elements established by the Norwegian scene while taking on unique characteristics in its various locales. Black metal retains three basic characteristics in all of its various incarnations: 1.) Black metal celebrates the irrational and primal; it is a critique of modern rationalism and secularism. 2.) Conflict between radical individualism and group identity and an attempt to accept both polarities simultaneously is one of the defining features of black metal culture. 3.) Black metal is centered on an extravagantly romantic view of nature and an idealized past; both of these signifiers being very much intertwined. Black metal unifies these

[127] *True Norwegian Black Metal* produced by VBS.tv and Moynihan and Soderlind pg 311.
[128] Moynihan and Soderlind, Chapter 7.
[129] Kahn-Harris, pgs 97-98
[130] Kahn-Harris, pgs 118-119

three elements through the abandonment of mundane identities and embrace of the mystical experience, as we will see in Chapter Two.

Chapter Two

Diabolical Full Moon Mysticism: Religion, Ritual and the Transcendence of the Mundane

Part One: Introduction

Religion is the primary characteristic that distinguishes black metal from its other extreme metal cousins. In all of my research I have not uncovered any areligious or ideologically neutral black metal. Although other forms of extremism occasionally are combined with religion, some type of spiritualized ideological reinforcement is one of black metal's defining characteristics. Black metal contains various types of Satanism, Paganism, and even Christianity, but some form of religious or spiritual basis is a prerequisite for black metal. A long-time black metal scene member whom I interviewed responded to my question asking if religion is a necessary aspect of black metal by saying: "I would imagine that most people who actually play black metal would answer your question with a resounding "FUCK, YES."[131] Religion and/or spirituality contextualizes black metal in a realm where magic, demons and other worlds are all very real and accessible to participants through music, ritual and performance.

Mysticism is the most inclusive and useful term when attempting to describe the spiritual range and shared attitudes of international black metal. Robert H. Sharf defines the mystical experience as "a transitory but potentially transformative state of consciousness in which a subject purports to come into immediate contact with the divine, the sacred, the holy."[132] Mystical experience with its personal connection to the divine is the primary focus of black metal music, ideology and identity. In virtually all interviews with black metal scene members that I have encountered, it becomes clear that black metal is a reaction against the mundanity,

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[131] 11-1-07.

[132] Sharf, Robert H. *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, Chapter Five: Experience pg 95. 1998, University of Chicago Press.

insincerity and emotional emptiness that participants feel is intrinsic to modern secular culture. It is an attempt to both resurrect a distant imagined past and create new transgressive identities based on mystical transcendence and ritual performance.

It is this sense of transcendence and proximity with the divine that black metalers find so woefully lacking in mainstream religion and culture.[133] Other forms of metal are rigidly secular and usually completely dismissive of religious experience;[134] black metal challenges this secularism with religious fanaticism. Enlightenment Christianity offers a stable, logical, moderate Christianity that does not interfere with other facets of the participant's life; black metal attacks moderate Christianity with violence, irrationality and a sense of spiritual power that encompasses all aspects of the participant's life.[135] Where black metalers see mainstream religion and culture as tolerant and unimposing, they attempt to be intolerant and uncompromising. As we will see, opposition, transgression and violence are central to the mystical experience of black metal.

Black metal's celebration of violence highlights black metal's desire to inflict damage on the mainstream culture that it sees as degenerate and spiritually empty. The French Satanic black metal band Arkhon Infaustus describe their opinion of mainstream culture in an interview with the webzine Chronicles of Chaos:

> We don't do all this to derange and shock people. We do it because it's the revelation of our inner selves. The fact is that what we are disturbing to the masses. We know that we are some anti-part of the world and the world knows it, like a void from the inside. They have fed us with their lives and now we take revenge on them. We have bred upon their morality, cults of devotion and laws. Never did we kneel, never did we follow, and never did we obey. Censorship is nothing to us, and they can be afraid, as it will get worse and worse.[136]

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[133] Moynihan, Michael and Soderlind, Didrik. *Lords of Chaos*, pgs 65-74. 2003 Feral House.
[134] Moynihan, Michael and Soderlind, Didrik, pgs 28-29.
[135] Baddeley, Gavin. *Lucifer Rising*, pgs 192-194. 1999, Plexus Publishing.
[136] *Chronicles of Chaos*, 2001.

In this quote, Arkhon Infaustus characterize mainstream culture as tyrannical, vapid and spiritually empty. They assert that black metal will be at the vanguard of a coming cultural upheaval that will dissipate mundanity and reverse the modernist project.

Two basic manifestations of religion are widespread throughout international black metal: Satanism and Neo-Paganism.[137] While there is a great deal of hybridization between these two general spiritual camps, these two categories are useful in making sense of the different tendencies and movements within black metal. The Satanic bands tend to focus more on violence and transgression,[138] while the Neo-Pagan bands tend to emphasize mysticism through nature, notions of the past and traditional culture.[139] While each of these camps tends to give mystical experiences based on either transgression or tradionalism priority over the other, both methods are used to varying degrees in both forms of black metal. Violence and transgression can be understood as black metal's method while a return to tradition and an idealized past is its goal. Mystical experience is the cohesive factor that binds black metal ideology together, allowing participants to transcend both modernity and individual consciousness.[140] In order to illustrate how black metalers achieve and understand mysticism, I will discuss black metal live performances before individually examining Satanic and Pagan worldviews individually.

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[137] Moynihan and Soderlind, pgs 195-197.
[138] Baddeley, pg 191.
[139] Moynihan and Soderlind, pg 201.
[140] Gardell, Mattias. *Gods of the Blood: The Pagan Revival and White Separatism*, pg 305. 2003 Duke University Press.

Part Two: Music for the Ritual Chamber

Satanic black metal bands are constantly reminding their audiences, and themselves, that the music and the performance being experienced are religious and ritualistic. Titles of songs, albums and tours frequently contain these ideological reinforcements: Emperor's *Emperial Live Ceremony* tour, Enthroned's *Black Goat Ritual* album, Impressions of Winter's *Into the Ritual Chamber* album, Azazel's *Music for the Ritual Chamber* album, and Shining's Myspace pronouncement that they have added three new "ceremonies" to their tour schedule are only a few examples. Black metal's insistence that performances are not for fun or entertainment refers back to their desire to situate live performances in a strictly ritualistic, religious context. Black metal fans and musicians are constantly struggling to reinforce the ritualistic nature of their music and performances, while trying to keep these elements from slipping into parody or spectacle. One prominent metal journalist whom I interviewed told me: "I've had interactions with black metal musicians who seem to have no sense of humor at all."[141] Black metal rituals must be serious, sincere, literal and explicitly religious in order for the rituals to have their intended effects: the mystical transcendence of the participant's mundane identity and communion with the deity.

Satanic black metal, through the performance of musical rituals, attempts to abandon mundane identities in favor of transgressive identities associated with the Satanic or supernatural world. Black metal live performances are consciously ritualistic and are interpreted as such by participants. Religion, or some form of mysticism, is a requisite quality for black metal music and ideology, and live performance is one of the primary ways that this defining facet of black metal culture is expressed. While most rock concerts have ritualistic qualities, Satanic black

[141] 11-10-07.

metal takes this idea very literally, incorporating sacrifice, self mortification, blood rituals and spirit possession rituals into their live performances.

King, bassist for the Norwegian black metal band Gorgoroth, explains the function of black metal: "Gorgoroth basically means terror. But when we present things to an audience it's the message that's important, it's not the music. Everything leads back to our main agenda, it's spreading the word of Satan or Satan himself. The band is spreading fear and we can actually use that fear to create and change."[142] Black metal is explicitly religious music, with its ambitions focused on transcendence and mysticism. Black metal represents one of the most extreme, violent and often repugnant polarities of popular culture and that is exactly why an understanding of it is necessary. Transgressive and disaffected subcultures create ideologies and form identities that attempt to reconcile the problems of modernity and dominant culture, providing us with a more nuanced perspective on popular culture and the possibilities for creation and empowerment available through it.

Live black metal performances are intended to bring musicians and fans into direct contact with the deity. This goal is achieved to varying degrees of intensity depending upon how radical the band in question's religious ambitions are, how successfully the ritual is performed and the audience's reception of, and participation in, the ritual. In the live performances that I have observed and studied, Satanic black metal musical rituals tend to be performed in three steps: 1.) A dramatic, ritualistic display of difference designed to alienate outsiders and establish solidarity among insiders. 2.) Acknowledgment that the performers, through ritual performance, have transcended their mundane, physical forms and taken on a spiritual persona associated with the deity. 3.) Invocation of the deity, allowing it to manifest on stage either through the music itself or through a type of bodily possession of the performers. The first step is the most

[142] *True Norwegian Black Metal*. VBS.tv.

commonly practiced by black metal bands and least ritualistically ambitious, the second is less common among black metal bands and more ritualistically ambitious, and the third is limited to the more fanatic and radical elements of the black metal underground. Each step builds upon the last, and if the first two are performed correctly, the ritual climaxes with the third and final stage.

Black metal musical rituals revel in transgression and inversion; the sacred is made into the profane, and the profane into the sacred. While other forms of Satanism, most notably Anton LaVey's Church of Satan, take the first step, they refrain from the latter steps.[143] Remaining in a strictly secular frame, the Church of Satan performs black masses that involve blasphemy and mockery of Christianity without ever adopting an alternative image of the sacred. For the Church of Satan, Satan is a purely symbolic figure, lacking any genuinely religious connotations.[144] Conversely, black metal takes Satan very seriously, often professing belief in a literal, biblical Satan and always elevating some spiritual entity to the level of the sacred. As Graveland frontman Darken pontificates in an interview with *Pitt* magazine, "Black metal is a sacred, religious music. Those who profane it are afraid of the black metal underground."[145] Black metal, while often reveling in transgression and blasphemy, does not abandon the idea of the sacred. Black metal ritual music is a framework through which transgressive, often violent, religious identities can be created, and through which cultural norms that participants find insubstantial and unsatisfying can be challenged.

Stage one of the ritual speaks to black metal's preoccupation with maintaining boundaries around scenes, incorporating only those who are "true" or "kvelt"[146] into the full ritual and attempting to expel all "posers" or casual observers. Black metal ritual performances can often

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[143] LaVey, Anton. *The Satanic Bible*, pgs 40-45. 1969, Avon Books.
[144] Baddeley, Gavin. Part One Chapter Six.
[145] *Pitt Magazine*, No. 15.
[146] This is a term of obscure origin often used by black metalers to designate a high level of extremism, sincerity and commitment within the black metal scene.

become fixated on this ritualistic aspect, performing stages two and three only towards the end of the performance once stage one has been thoroughly performed or, among the less religiously ambitious bands, not at all.

One of the most unique aspects of black metal culture is its candid self awareness. Stage one, the alienation and intensification phase of the ritual, is the most commonly practiced black metal rite and is usually performed towards the beginning of the ritual, particularly if more mystical rites will be performed later on in the ritual. Black metal fans and musicians are very much aware of the ritualistic nature of their music and live performances. One black metal fan whom I interviewed explained the function of violent, gory stage performances: "Black metal is ritual music. Black metal performance often has a ritual aspect as well. The more extravagant and powerful the imagery, the more the feeling that one is not just going to a show. Instead, one feels that they are participating in a ceremony."[147] When I asked him if blood, animal heads and self-mutilation were designed to scare away outsiders, he replied, "Yes, it is almost certainly designed to alienate outsiders." Black metal is all too aware of the tendency for counter-cultures to be reincorporated and modified by the entertainment industry. Constant vigilance is required in policing those who are "true" from those who are "wimps" or "posers." Ritualistically, elements involving animal blood and body parts are designed to remind the faithful that they are in a unique, spiritually vital scene, while reminding outsiders and the uncommitted that they do not belong.

Mayhem, the foundational, scene-defining Norwegian black metal band, are famous for their extravagant, often violent performance of the alienation stage of the black metal musical ritual and set an early ritualistic standard that is still adhered to today. Dead, deceased vocalist

[147] 10-1-07.

of Mayhem during the late 80's and early 90's, explains how he alienates people at their performances who are not committed to black metal spirituality and ideology:

> "Most of the people that were in there were wimps and I don't want them to watch our gigs. Before we began to play there was a crowd of about 300 in there, but in the second song *Necrolust* we began to throw around those pig's heads. Only 50 were left, I liked that! We had a great time throwing the heads on each other. I got angry at some idiots who had their heads up in the air, so I wiped the blood on my arms all over again. We wanna scare those shouldn't be at our concerts, and they will have to escape through the emergency exit with parts of their body missing, so we can have something to throw around. Some imagine for some weird reason that death metal[148] is something normal and available for everyone. Death/black metal is something all ordinary mortals should fear, not make into a trend!"[149]

Throwing parts of dead animals, animal blood and human blood into the crowd continues to be, in spite of numerous deaths and departures within the band, a basic element of Mayhem's performances.[150] The primary purpose of this stage of the ritual is to alienate the "wimps" and "posers" in the audience, establishing a distinct sense of uniqueness and authenticity amongst those who are not alienated by the ritual.

Ritualistic elements such as sheep's heads and animal blood are designed to alienate outsiders, but they are also often employed as meaningful religious signifiers directed towards believers. When employed in this way, shock tactics can look towards stage two of the black metal ritual: the transcendence of the mundane and the taking on of identities associated with the deity. Shock value is only part of black metal performances; sheep's heads, pentagrams, upside-down crosses and acts of self mutilation are all interpreted as coherent, meaningful iconography by participants. Infernus, the guitarist for Gorgoroth, explains the significance of severed sheep's heads in their stage shows: "For even the most illiterate, the sheep does represent flock mentality. Flock mentality has many names, and one of them are [sic] Christianity, with its

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[148] During this period, the terms "death" and "black" metal were sometimes used interchangeably. Since the late 80's black metal and death metal have established very distinct musical and cultural identities from one another.
[149] *Mega Mag*, 1990.
[150] See *Mayhem: Legions Live at Marseille* DVD, 2003.

contempt for real power and beauty."[151] While instilling fear and alienation amongst outsiders is certainly an important aspect of such imagery, violent and Satanic imagery also serve to unite insiders and to communicate religious messages.

Black metal musical rituals can be understood to be what Manuel H. Peña calls "rites of intensification,"[152] that is, rituals that reinforce the participants' sense of themselves as a group and a distinct culture. In this way, animal heads, blood and other types of grotesque stage performance serve a dual purpose: to expel and cause anxiety in outsiders and to create a strong sense of shared identity and difference amongst participants. Their sense of difference from outsiders can be a bridge between stage one of the ritual, the alienation stage, and stage two, the adoption of transgressive and/or supernatural identities.

Self mutilation is one of the most common and significant ritualistic aspects of black metal musical performances. Like other extravagant, violent imagery evident in black metal live performances, acts of self mutilation serve the dual purpose of removing the unwanted elements in the audience and reinforcing solidarity among the true believers. But unlike stage props like animal heads and pentagrams, self-mutilation anticipates stage two, the mystical, transformative phase of the ritual performance and the transcendence of the body that mysticism is intended to achieve. Mortification of the flesh can symbolically devalue the physical world, while allowing the participant to achieve mystical states of consciousness through the pain being inflicted. It (so named because he claims to be too evil to be considered human), frontman of the Swedish black metal band Abruptum, is famous for his acts of self mutilation both on stage and in the studio while recording his vocals.[153]

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[151] *Newsweek*, Poland. 2004.
[152] Peña, Manuel H. Ritual Structure in a Chicano Dance, Readings in Ritual Studies, pg 423. 1996, Prentice Hall Inc.
[153] Moynihan and Soderlind, pg 117.

Mayhem set the standard for black metal musical rituals in the early 90's and continues to police the intersecting boundaries of performance and ideology today. Speaking only a few weeks prior to his suicide, Dead describes his self-mutilation during Mayhem performances:

"Another aspect of the live show is when I cut myself up. Something I study is how people react when my blood is streaming everywhere, but that's not why I do it. I like to cut, in others preferably, but mostly in myself. That I can't do it too often…makes me a bit mournful. The nearest thing is three gigs in Sweden which will probably be in the end of May and I think that if I take a highly tuned kitchen saw machine that's cutting and sawing faster than it's possible to control…that would be a nice thing to have there. Another band there will try to get a goat that they shall sacrifice on stage with a fireman's axe."[154]

Dead's description articulates that his self-mutilation is not primarily for alienating outsiders (although this is a beneficial side-effect) but that he gains personal, ritualistic benefit from these performative aspects. His comment regarding the planned animal sacrifice also highlights the consciously, almost ostentatiously, ritualistic nature of black metal live performances. Bodily mutilation is both symbolic and physical in its effects; the destruction of the human body symbolically devalues the body and the physical world while also inflicting pain that could assist in achieving altered states of consciousness. Acts of self mutilation, while also reinforcing stage one of the ritual, are primarily focused on stage two; they aim towards the devaluation of the mundane/physical world and the attainment of transgressive/mystical identities through that devaluation.

The next to most recent singer for Mayhem, Maniac, shares his predecessor's penchant for self mortification. When asked by an interviewer why he performs acts of self mutilation on stage, Maniac explains:

"I doubt that I would be here now if it was not for Mayhem. When I enter the stage its not like, 'Now I'm going to act like an actor.' Because what happens on stage is a part of me. And that's why Mayhem has been so important to me. It has become an expression for a part of

[154] *C.O.T.I.M Magazine*, 1990.

my personality. Definitely! That is why [laughs] Mayhem is so nice. No, it's part of the extreme expression. You are a fool if you do that [self-mutilation] only because of image."[155]

What Maniac calls "the extreme expression" must be understood to be *ritual* expression, specifically through mystical transcendence of the body and the self. In virtually all interviews black metalers give that refer to live performances, they are emphatic that live performances are not for entertainment or spectacle. Sincerity, authenticity and extremity are valued above all else.[156] Black metal live performances are musical rituals designed to achieve both scenic solidarity and mystical transcendence.

The use of "corpse paint" as part of the ritual costume is a powerful means of enhancing black metal musical rituals. Corpse paint is usually black and white face paint worn by black metal fans and musicians to make themselves look and feel closer to the deity. Abbath, singer and guitarist for Immortal, communicates his feelings regarding corpse paint: "The reason we use makeup is to celebrate our inner demons. It's a celebration; it's not a theatre thing. This was my first shot [gestures to face-paint], I never tried different things. The first time I put on makeup, this was it. This is me."[157] This explanation is typical; black metal allows participants to "celebrate" and become one with their "inner demons." Abbath's insistence that the grotesque, corpse painted apparition on stage is the "real him" illustrates black metal musical ritual's ability to unify the mundane, human musician with the supernatural "inner demons" being invoked. More ritualistically ambitious black metal bands wear corpse paint to become the physical manifestation of the music; to abandon mundane identities in the most obvious, extravagant ways possible.

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[155] NRK T.V., 2001.
[156] Moynihan and Soderlind, pgs 63-80.
[157] Zebub, Bill. *Black Metal: A Documentary.*

Corpse paint is a ritualistic means of inviting the deity, or "inner demons," to inhabit the participant and manifest itself/themselves on stage. By making themselves look inhuman, black metal participants go a long way towards abandoning their mundanity/humanity in favor of mystical communion with the supernatural. Emperor Magus Caligula, vocalist for Dark Funeral, describes the religious and ritualistic significance of corpse paint: "You paint your inner face, that's what we are all about. You just let Satan take over your fucking hand and draw your fucking face."[158] Again, we see the conflict between the external, mundane world and the inner spiritual world that Satanic black metalers believe is inhabited by Satan. Through the use of corpse paint, and through musical ritual in general, participants hope to tap into this inner world and the spiritual potency that they believe exists there. In this way, black metalers are not only invoking Satan, but attempting to *become* Satan.

The use of "demonic" pseudonyms is another way that black metal performers disassociate themselves from everyday, mundane life. Black metal, as we have seen, is an attempt to transcend mundane, secular, human identities in favor of supernatural, mystical identities based on communion with the deity. Virtually all black metal musicians use demonic pseudonyms, the names quoted earlier being only a few examples. French poststructuralist theorists Deleuze and Guattari pay a great deal of attention to questions of fragmented identities and the multiplicity of the human mind, attacking Freud's attempt to reduce the mind to his tripartite model. In reference to the use of names and pseudonyms in the process of a person exploring his or her multiplicity, Deleuze and Guattari write, "The proper name does not designate an individual: it is on the contrary when the individual opens up to the multiplicities pervading him or her, at the outcome of the most severe operation of depersonalization, that he

[158] Zebub, Bill. *Black Metal: A Documentary.*

or she acquires his or her true proper name."[159] In this sense, "Abbath" is Abbath's "true proper name;" or as he says, "the real me." Black metal attempts to abandon singular, mundane, secular identities in favor of mystical, collective identities in communion with the deity or the supernatural; demonic pseudonyms are one way that this "most severe operation of de-person-alization" is achieved in the context of musical ritual.

Communion or merging with Satan is one method that black metal employs to reconcile hyper-individualism with the pleasures of group identity. In lyrics and interviews, black metalers often discuss becoming one with Satan and representing his embodiment through their subjectivity. As the black metal band Mysticum's Myspace page so eloquently states: "We are representing total destruction of civilizations and human minds, because we are the true worshipers of the black cosmos and the ones that will guide you to planet Satan, collecting your souls. Damn you all, Hail Satan!"[160] Mysticism, transcendence of the human body and mortification of the flesh are all ritualistic aspects of black metal culture designed to merge the individual with the collective, the collective usually being embodied by the "spirit of Satan" or, as in the quote given above, "planet Satan."

The most ritualistically ambitious and successful bands attempt to achieve stage three of the black metal musical ritual, usually towards the end of the performance. Stage three attempts to bring the deity, usually Satan, into the audience's presence either through the music or through the spiritual possession of the band members. Live black metal musical performance is a means of bridging the spiritual and the material as well as the individual and the collective. Black metal attempts to do this in a number of different ways; it attempts to put a face and a physicality to the

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[159] Deleuze, Gilles and Guattari, Felix. *1914: One or Several Wolves? Capitalism and Schizophrenia Vol. 2: A Thousand Plateaus*, pg 37. 1987, The University of Minnesota Press.
[160] www.myspace.com/mysticum.

music, as well as an embodiment to the deity being invoked. The Satanic black metal band Watain explain:

> "Our live shows have always been orgies in blood and fire, because this is simply the way our music looks when it manifests physically. People are so very shocked and 'taken aback' by our live performances but then what do they expect? True artistry has an essence that shines through everything: music, lyrics, ideals, aesthetics. Watain is a Satanic band, it is based upon sinister energy and thus our live shows manifests accordingly. We build upon the stage a temple of panic, chaos, magic and death, showing to the audience the true, ugly face of the horrible abomination that is black metal!"[161]

Watain speak of their music as if it were a completely separate entity; something beyond their control to be invoked and then unleashed upon audiences. Black metal vocalist Gaahl stated candidly in an interview: "Black metal *is* Satanism…there is no other answer. My only goal is to procreate Satan. The main goal in the world, you'd have to be able to remove the word Satan from every man's tongue and simply *become* it."[162] Through ritual performance black metal attempts to become Satan; to bring into the audience's presence, through the musical ritual, the essence of the deity. Stage three of the black metal musical ritual is attempted only by those bands that take Satanism very literally and seriously, and those bands certainly do exist. What is important here is not whether these bands are actually achieving what they think they are achieving or not, but that what *they believe* gives meaning to their rituals, identities and worldview.

As we have seen, through the alienation of outsiders, reaffirmation of the "insider" status of participants, abandonment of everyday identity through costume and self mortification, and finally invocation and communion with the deity, black metal fans and musicians attempt to achieve mystical transcendence through musical ritual and ritual music. By establishing perhaps the most transgressive and extravagant identities currently available through popular culture,

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[161] Disobedience Ezine, April 26th, 2007.
[162] VBS.t.v. *True Norwegian Black Metal.*

black metal attempts to rectify the problems of secular modernity and create a unique and exclusive subculture in which empowerment and meaning can be established.

Interpretations of black metal that characterize it as being simply a particularly bizarre genre of heavy metal, such as those given by Keith Kahn-Harris[163] and to a lesser extent Sam Dunn[164], are misleading. While black metal's musical roots are undoubtedly to be found in the genealogy of heavy metal music, it has moved beyond the confines of metal culture into the realm of religious sects and millenarian cults. Black metal musical rituals are profoundly different in character from the concerts of even the most closely related styles such as death metal. Death metal concerts are designed to be, first and foremost, fun.[165] Black metal concerts are religious rituals designed to achieve mystical transcendence of the mundane and physical worlds; having fun is often seen by participants as being negative.[166]

Part Two: Cut Your Flesh and Worship Satan: Satanism, Devil Worship and Mysticism

Mystical, religious identification with the biblical Satan is the most common form of spiritual expression in black metal. While exactly what "Satan" means to participants can vary widely, virtually all Satanic black metalers interviewed identify Satan with a sense of transcendence and intoxicating power that exists both inside of participants and in the external world. When asked what Satan means to him, Gaahl, vocalist for the Norwegian black metal band Gorgoroth, ruminated on the question for several moments before answering simply,

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[163] *Kahn-Harris, Keith. Extreme Metal: Music and Culture on the Edge*. 2007, Berg.
[164] Dunn, Sam. *Metal: A Headbanger's Journey*.
[165] Moynihan and Soderlind, pgs 28-29.
[166] Baddeley, pgs 191-193.

"Freedom."[167] This is a very telling answer; Gaahl's reference to freedom can be understood to refer to spiritual transcendence. Satanic black metal, unlike the more secular Church of Satan,[168] retains Satan's status as a spiritual entity that exists in the world. Participants attempt to embody the spirit of Satan; to become him and build identities based on the mystical experience of communion with Satan.[169]

Lyrical content is one of the primary ways of communicating Satanic ideology in black metal. One black metal fan whom I interviewed quipped, "Some music, you play it backwards and you get Satanic messages. With black metal, you play it forwards and you get Satanic messages."[170] An early song by the foundational Norwegian black metal band Emperor titled *I am the Black Wizards* describes the spirit of Satan as embodying both nature and those who serve him:

Summon the souls of macrocosm.
No age will escape my wrath.
I travel through time and return to the future.
I gather wisdom now lost.
I visit again the eternally ancient caves,
before a mighty emperor thereupon came.
Watching the mortals "discovering" my chronicles, guarded
by the old demons, even unknown to me.

How many wizards that serve me with evil, I know not.
My empire has no limits.

From the never ending mountains black, to the bottomless lakes
I am the ruler and have been for eternities long.
I am them,
I am them,
I am them
My wizards are many, but their essence is mine.
Forever they are in the hills in their stone homes of grief

[167] Dunn, Sam. *Metal: A Headbanger's Journey.*
[168] LaVey, pg 25.
[169] Baddeley, pgs 191-200.
[170] 16-10-07.

Because I am the spirit of their existence
I am them
I am them
I am them

The refrain, "I am them," is particularly effective in describing the spirit of Satan (or some type of spiritual entity) that Satanic black metalers believe resides in and embodies the "black wizards," a.k.a. themselves. The title *I am the Black Wizards* refers to Satan and his followers being one; embodying different physical bodies but always united by mystical experience. The speaker, who must be understood to be both the vocalist and Satan himself, reminds us, "My wizards are many but their essence is mine." The spiritual core of the "wizard" is the spirit of Satan. Each "wizard" retains his physical, corporeal body and is an individual as such, but he is also the embodiment of both Satan and his fellow wizards. It is in this mystical relationship that the apparent contradiction between radical individualism and collective identity that is central to black metal identity begins to be reconciled.

The lyrics of *I am the Black Wizards* are also concerned with questions of time and space. The speaker tells us: "I travel through time and return to the future." This statement implies both that history is not a fixed, stable reality and that through mystical experience the participant's physical existence can be transcended. Black metal's dissatisfaction with contemporary culture and religion is one of its defining features; mysticism allows black metalers to extricate themselves from the cultural and historical circumstances that they find mundane and oppressive. Black metal is preoccupied with escape, transcendence, ascendancy and, as Gaahl so pertinently puts it, freedom. Mystical communion with Satan allows black metalers the possibility of spiritual identification with the divine, and the abandonment of self that such identification achieves, while simultaneously attaining individual empowerment in their corporeal daily lives.

Satanic black metal is also about violence, transgression and destruction. Violence to one's self, animals, other people and objects associated with authority (namely churches) is part of the process of transcending mundanity. Ihshan, vocalist and guitarist for Emperor, explains,

> "In general, the Satanic imagery and ideology and the moral system of black metal are so much different from what you are taught when you were a kid, with the natural morals and whatever of society. So in the beginning the ideology might seem very destructive, because you have to break down all the old belief systems to replace them with the new ones. I must admit, I have been very self-destructive myself during the period where I went through all the changes, sifting out all the old values for the new ones."[171]

Violence, destruction and hatred are all standard black metal responses to mundanity and modernity. The Norwegian church burnings are the most obvious example of this; grave desecrations, murders and suicides are others. Transgression is the cornerstone of black metal mysticism and ritual. Identification with pain, violence and evil allows black metalers to reject modern, secular culture in a very meaningful, dramatic way. Dead, the deceased vocalist of Mayhem, asserts, "Black metal is something all ordinary mortals should fear!"[172] Black metalers want people to be afraid of them; they want to be Christianity's bogeymen. Black metal identity is based on a conscious desire to become the Other.

Black metal has made a concerted effort to alienate themselves not only from mainstream culture but from other transgressive subcultures as well. Euronymous, founding member and guitarist of Mayhem, describes the three categories of Satanists and explains black metal's relationship to them:

> 1. They who call themselves Satanists after they have practiced occult rituals.
> 2. The followers of the Church of Satan and its founder Anton LaVey.
> 3. Often called 'the violent Satanists'-devil worshipers.
>
> The guys in Mayhem are against the people in category 1 and 2. Church of Satan call themselves Satanists because they think it's funny and provoking. They are really atheists and are against the church because it has caused too much evil upon the time. They predicate that the

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[171] *Terrorizer*. June 1996.
[172] *Mega Mag*, 1991.

Christians are evil and theirself are good ones [sic]. We are against the Church of Satan because we are against goodness.[173]

The identification with evil and the biblical Satan illustrate a desire to transgress both cultural and counter-cultural boundaries; to abandon altogether the discourses of modernity and progress. Evil and devil worship are attractive to black metalers precisely because they are irrational, destructive and alienating.

With Odin on Our Side: Heathenism, Traditionalism and Mysticism

Pagan black metal, while sharing many defining cultural traits with Satanic black metal, also has some unique characteristics. The most pronounced of these is its heavy emphasis on tradition, history, and indigenous identity. While black metal bands all over the world have incorporated myriad pagan and indigenous traditions into their music, visual art and costumes,[174] I will be principally concerned with Old Norse Paganism (or Asá Trŭ as it is known within the pagan community) since it is the most common, widespread and well documented form of Pagan black metal.

While most Satanic black metal bands, particularly in the Nordic countries, have a strong sense of national identity, Pagan black metal takes notions of place and history and makes them the centerpiece of their mode of cultural expression. In *Gods of the Blood,* his seminal study of the neo-Pagan movement, Mattias Gardell explains:

> It involves reconstructions or reinventions of pre-Christian religious traditions, typically perceived as a "return" or "revival" of some old time religion of the pre-modern era. Looking for meaning beyond secular science and consumer culture, propelled by a search for roots and identity, and entertaining romanticized urban notions of nature, pagans generally find the future in the past.[175]

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[173] *Beat Mag* #2
[174] Kahn-Harris, pgs 40-41.
[175] Gardell, pg 137.

This description is for the most part very applicable to Asá Trŭ black metal but with the exception of two important differences: 1.) most Asá Trŭ black metalers are from the rural countryside, *not* the city.[176] 2.) Old Norse mythology and religion is still very much celebrated in mainstream Nordic culture, although as a historical symbol of national identity rather than as a religious framework.[177] Nordic Asá Trŭ black metalers have a much more immediate, historically grounded, cultural connection with their form of paganism than, for instance, a Wiccan in New York City might have. In addition, Asá Trŭ relies much more heavily on ancient written sources, archeology and known established traditions from the past than do many of their Wicca, Druid and Goddess Worshiping counterparts.[178] Numerous black metal bands combine Asá Trŭ with radical right-wing politics, a subject I will return to in greater detail in Chapter Four. The Asá Trŭ black metal discussed in this chapter is predominantly apolitical and antiracist, and my analysis in this chapter will focus on their religious worldview rather than their political worldview.

Enslaved, probably the most famous Asá Trŭ black metal band in Norway (or anywhere else in the world), focus their lyrical content towards themes of apocalypse, rebirth and cultural revival. While the majority of the early Norwegian black metal bands went through a Satanic phase at one point or another,[179] Enslaved were adamant from very early on about their disinterest in both Satanism and Neo-Nazism. Enslaved's first demo, titled *Yggdrasil,*[180] was released in 1991 and set the tone for the highly-experimental and mythologically based music they would produce in the years to come. Promotional photos from the early and mid 90's show

[176] Moynihan and Soderlind, pg 201.
[177] Moynihan and Soderlind, pg 204-207.
[178] Gardell, pgs 138-146.
[179] Baddeley, 191-195.
[180] The world tree upon which Odin hung himself in order to obtain the magic runes as described in both the Prose and the Poetic Eddas.

Enslaved dressed in Viking Age clothing, sporting enormous beards, and carrying swords and axes.[181] Thor's hammer, as represented in several Viking age necklaces found in burial sites,[182] is incorporated into the band's logo along with two dragon's heads emerging from the clearly stave-church inspired script. In keeping with Gardell's assessment, Enslaved's lyrics and religious attitude emphasize a revitalization of ancient culture and an impending rebirth of Old Norse religion. Whereas their Satanic and Neo-Nazi counterparts stress anger, belligerence and shock tactics, Enslaved, and most non-racist Asá Trŭ bands, tell the ancient stories and mull over the major events in Old Norse mythology in order to point towards a new Pagan era on the horizon.

Enslaved go beyond the one-dimensional shock tactic use of mythological images and ideas that are common in the metal world, towards a more thoughtful, informed representation. In an interview with the ezine *Maelstrom,* guitarist Ivar Peersen explains Enslaved's approach to mythology:

> It's more or less a tribute to these darker places, these sub-worlds, that come along with all existences, so to speak. Our consciousness being coupled with a sub-consciousness. In mythology you have the Gods and beneath the Gods, you'll have trolls or dark creatures that lurk. It's kind of an acknowledgement that in a lot of cases these dark places are where life or ideas spring from.[183]

Enslaved, as well as other thoughtful black metalers, often associate Asá Trŭ with creativity and inspiration. This representation has a solid grounding in the Old Norse traditions, with Odin being closely associated with inspiration, poetry and creativity in the Icelandic Eddas.[184] Rather than falling back on ambiguous notions like "darkness" or "evil" that are so popular with Satanic black metalers, Asá Trŭ black metalers focus their mystic interests on

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[181] See Picture A2.
[182] Wilson, pg 41.
[183] http://www.maelstrom.nu/ezine/interview_iss14_10.php.
[184] Orchard, Andy. *Cassell's Dictionary of Norse Myth & Legend*, pg 276. 2002, Cassell.

creativity, connection with an ancient, ancestral past, and communion with the Old Norse Gods. This communion is less similar to the intoxicating spiritual possession of Satanic black metalers described earlier, and rather closer to a long term connection based on guidance, advice and inspiration.

Odin sacrificed himself to himself in order to travel into death and outside of time to gain the knowledge of written language.[185] This act of mystical knowedge gathering serves as a model for Asá Trŭ black metalers who seek to reestablish a connection with the ancient past. Writing, song and artistic creativity are considered virtually synonymous with magic in the Eddas. In the Eddic poem Hàvamàl,[186] Odin describes learning creative magic through mead consumption:

> Nine mighty songs I learned from the son
> of Bolthorn,[187] Bestla's father,
> and I came to drink of that costly mead
> the holy vessel held.
>
> Thus I learned the secret lore
> Prospered and waxed in wisdom;
> I won words from the words I sought,
> verses multiplied where I sought verse."[188]

In the Eddic poems intoxication, magic and artistic creativity are very closely related. In the Eddas, as well as the Sagas, chanting, singing and poetry are all closely associated with Odin and are considered magical, mystical acts. It is appropriate that black metalers familiar with the Eddas and the Sagas would make the connection between magic and creativity within an Old Norse context.

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[185] *Poems of the Elder Edda*. Translated by Patricia Terry. 1990 University of Pennsylvania Press.
[186] "Sayings of the High One," in Old Norse.
[187] A giant to whom Odin was related. See *Cassell's Dictionary of Norse Mythology*, pgs 67-68. 2002, Cassell.
[188] Terry, pg 31.

Enslaved's lyrics are almost exclusively mythological in content. Enslaved envision a Pagan uprising against Christianity that will return Northern Europe to its pre-Christian cultural roots.[189] While notions of cultural reorganization and rebirth are certainly on the agenda, Enslaved do not indulge in fantasies of butchering Christians, opting for a much more practical solution involving a cultural and religious revival that does not necessarily involve violence. On a track from the 1997 *Eld* album entitled Hordalendingen,[190] vocalist Grutle Kjellson bellows:

> A forgotten treasure is now recovered
> Brought out from the darkness of Midgard
> Its powers will never again disappear
> It is guarded by a man from Hordaland.
>
> A night of sorrow will soon be over
> Memories from ancient times will glow
> A wind blows away the dust from an ancient sword
> Two ravens will predict His return.[191]

Enslaved refer specifically to two mythological elements described in the Eddas. In this passage, Midgard is the land of men that lies between the land of the giants and the land of the Gods.[192] The line "two ravens will predict His return," refers to Odin's two ravens Hugin and Munin (Thought and Memory) who fly throughout the world gathering news and gossip on Odin's behalf[193] and the predicted return clearly is that of Odin. These lyrics attempt to instigate a spiritual reawakening regarding the old Gods amongst Nordic peoples and can best be understood as essentially religious in nature rather than simply fantasies of power, race and violence.

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[189] Gardell, pgs 264-266.
[190] The Man From Hordaland, Hordaland being a region in Western Norway where both Enslaved and a large number of Vikings are/were from.
[191] Lyrics transcribed by Darklyrics.com (http://www.darklyrics.com/lyrics/enslaved/eld.html#1). Translated from the Norwegian by Under the Funeral Moon.
[192] Orchard, pg 252.
[193] Orchard, pg 276.

Enslaved attempt to find cultural and spiritual vitality in the pre-Christian traditions of their ancestors that they feel is lacking in both Christianity and Satanism. By doing this through music and lyrics/poetry they extol and proliferate Old Norse religion in a way that is not so different from the oral ways in which it was celebrated in ancient times.[194] Prior to the establishment of Christianity, written language only existed in the Nordic countries in the runic characters which were rarely used to record histories, stories or religious texts. Old Norse religion was largely an oral tradition communicated through stories and songs.[195] Enslaved attempt to resurrect the oral traditions associated with Asá Trŭ and establish a religious identity for themselves that is as firmly rooted in history and tradition as possible while rejecting most of the belligerence and misanthropy that is so common in Satanic and National Socialist black metal. In terms of both goals and methodology, Enslaved are much more serious than most bands in the scene. They see themselves as part of a religious movement working towards the preservation, propagation and celebration of Old Norse religion and culture. Mattias Gardell's assessment of Asá Trŭ groups in the United Sates is also true for Enslaved and many Asá Trŭ black metalers in Scandinavia: "members envision a revived Norse Heathen religion with Pagan communities, schools and public hofs[196] in every major American city."[197] Unlike Satanic black metalers, non-racist Asá Trŭ black metalers emphasize revitalized tradition over violence and transgression.

Einherjer,[198] hailing from the north-west of Norway, keep even more closely to ancient texts and traditions. While Enslaved reference Norse mythology, Einherjer quote passages from

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[194] Davidson, Part Two.
[195] Davidson, pgs 13-15.
[196] A "hof" is a Pagan temple.
[197] *Gods of the Blood*, pg 162.
[198] "lone-fighters" in Old Norse, the Einherjer were Odin's army of human warriors who died in battle and train with him in Valhall, preparing for the final battle of Ragnarök against Loki and the giants.

the Eddas in their lyrics and re-tell the old stories through their songs. The track *Out of Gunnungagap*[199] from their 1998 album *Odin Owns Ye All* quotes the Eddic poem Völuspá:

> When Ymir[200] lived a long time ago
> was no sand nor sea nor surging waves.
> Nowhere was there earth, nor heaven above
> only Gunnungagap and grass nowhere
> The sons of Bur then built up the lands
> Created the great Midgard to be.[201]

Einherjer's quotation of Völuspá marks a shift away from the Tolkien-inspired imagery of earlier metal and towards a religious mythology grounded in ancient texts and archeology. This shift places their music and artwork in a specifically Nordic context grounded in ancient texts and beliefs. Power metal bands like Manowar utilized "sword and sorcery" imagery based on Conan the Barbarian and other popular literature that may have had some second-hand grounding in medieval culture, but Einherjer explore Old Norse mythology grounded in ancient texts, *not* contemporary fantasy.

On their last two albums, 2000's *Norwegian Native Art* and 2003's *Blot*, Einherjer express a particular interest in the rites of human sacrifice that were practiced by pre-Christian Nordic peoples. The track entitled *Howl Ravens Come* from *Norwegian Native Art* describes the practice of drawing the "blood eagle"[202] on an enemy's back:

> Blood Eagle carved
> with a bone biting sword.
> Song of the wielded
> Howl the Raven's cord.[203]

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[199] Gunnungagap is translated by Patricia Terry as, "gaping emptiness." This refers to the primordial chaos before the earth's creation.
[200] Ymir was the primordial giant whose body the world was created from. Orchard, pg 404. The first line of these lyrics paraphrases the first two sections of Völuspá with the quotation beginning on the second line.
[201] Einherjer sing in English (quite intelligibly by Black Metal standards) and the translation of Völuspá that they use is slightly different from Terry's. See *Poems of the Elder Edda*, pg 1. Translated by Patricia Terry.
[202] Orchard, pg 63.
[203] As far as I can tell these are original lyrics that were not borrowed from any ancient text. At times Einherjer mimic the style and phrasing of Eddic poetry in their original lyrics and at other times borrow passages wholesale from the Eddas or Sagas.

The Blood Eagle, described by Snorri Sturlusson [204] and the Orkneyinga Saga, was a particularly gruesome form of sacrifice that may or may not have actually been practiced, that involved making an incision in the victims' back and pulling the lungs out from behind.[205] Einherjer's fascination with human sacrifice illustrates an interesting intersection between Viking Metal's mythological motifs and the more widespread extreme metal tendency towards images of gore, horror and mutilation. Horrific imagery in extreme metal, as Keith Kahn-Harris discusses at length, creates boundaries around a scene and alienates outsiders who might infiltrate and corrupt it. [206]

By definition, extreme metal is music on the fringes of culture; a scene defined by its outsider status. Horrific imagery is one of the primary ways in which this outsider authenticity is achieved and maintained. It is not coincidental that the term "heathen" comes from the Old Norse word *heið* meaning heath or moor. A *heiðing* is not just someone who worships the old Gods, but someone *from the heath*, in other words, outside of civilization. In this sense, Einherjer make use of established metal conventions involving the abject, while combining those conventions with mythological symbolism grounded in place and history.

To what extent fans, particularly international fans, are aware of the context and meaning of Einherjer's lyrics is difficult to say. In interviews, Einherjer explain unambiguously that their lyrics are taken from or inspired by the Eddas: "Our main source is the older Edda.[207] There are different legends that inspire us in addition, for example the Icelandic Sagas or the Snorri

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[204] Orchard, pg 332.
[205] Orchard, pg 63.
[206] Kahn-Harris, Keith, Chapter Two, pg 78.
[207] A collection of anonymous Old Norse verse that dates from sometime before the 13th century, detailing various stories and motifs regarding the pagan Gods. Orchard, pg 282.

Saga."[208] Whether this admission sent legions of black metalers flocking to their local library to check out the Elder Edda is beyond the immediate scope of this project but an assessment of album reviews and fan oriented postings regarding Einherjer suggest that most of the references are falling on deaf ears. One album reviewer in the Native North fanzine wonders, "What is a *Yggdrasil* anyway?"[209] Most fans and reviewers seem to be aware that Einherjer are singing about Vikings and the old Gods but the more obscure references seem to be lost on most listeners and it is unlikely that very many fans realize that Einherjer are actually quoting Medieval Icelandic verse. Again, Einherjer are playing both sides of the fence; their references can be interpreted as traditional gore or sword and sorcery imagery by fans uninterested in or oblivious to the religious connotations of their music, but fans in the Nordic countries or those who are Asá Trŭ will receive a more specific message. In this sense, Asá Trŭ black metal is more compromising and open to interpretation that Satanic black metal.

It is significant that Asá Trŭ black metal bands tend to focus on two interconnected myths: the creation myth and the Ragnarök myth. The Norse cosmology does not function on a linear model of time; time is cyclical in Norse mythology.[210] Ragnarök is dissimilar to the Christian apocalypse in that the world is born anew following its destruction and the cycle of time begins again. Völuspá describes this transition of cosmic death and rebirth:

> The sun turns black, the sun sinks below the sea
> no bright star now shines from the heavens;
> flames leap the length of the World Tree
> fire strikes against the very sky.
>
> She sees the earth rising again
> Out of the waters green once more

[208] Interview taken from a poorly translated German fanzine: 1999-2007. http://64.233.179.104/translate_c?hl=en&u=http://www.metal-inside.de/&prev=/search%3Fq%3DEinherjer%2Binterview%26hl%3Den%26sa%3DN
[209] Native North, 2001.
[210] Orchard, pg 285.

> An eagle flies over rushing waterfalls
> Hunting for fish from the craggy heights. [211]

This idea is represented in the image of the world serpent eating its own tail[212] and echoed in Nietzsche's notion of eternal recurrence.[213] Einherjer are suggesting with this imagery that while Paganism may have been defeated a thousand years ago, its rebirth is inevitable and impending. The Nordic countries' conversions to Christianity are equated with the gods' destruction at Ragnarök, and Einherjer suggest that Norse Paganism will soon be "rising again out of the waters, green once more." Einherjer are not simply co-opting Viking age imagery for its sword-and-sorcery appeal in the way that many other metal bands do; they are suggesting a reassessment of Nordic cultural identity. We have seen that notions of cultural rebirth and reestablishment of the Old Norse Gods as a central part of Norwegian life are taken very seriously in Einherjer's music. Asá Trŭ is not simply used as potent imagery; it is intended to be a religious message.

Asá Trŭ black metal attempts to create a semiotic framework grounded in ancient, indigenous traditions to serve as an alternative to Christianity, Satanism and the nihilism of other forms of extreme metal. Death metal, thrash and grindcore are iconoclastic;[214] Asá Trŭ black metal, church burnings aside, attempts to reestablish tradition. Asá Trŭ black metal is simultaneously conservative and radical. Asá Trŭ black metal's notion of an idealized golden age prior to the proliferation of Christianity serves as an imaginary cultural beacon; an alternative cultural identity that is both familiar and transgressive. Association with the ancient

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[211] Terry, pg 7.
[212] Orchard, pg 252.
[213] Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, pg 56. Translated by Walter Kaufmann, 1966, Vintage Books.
[214] Moynihan and Soderlind , pgs 28-30.

past and an ancestral lineage is another method of connecting the participants' subjectivity with that of his or her ancestors; an attempt to reconcile the individual with the collective.

Conclusion

While the primary focus of this chapter has been Nordic Satanic and Asá Trŭ black metal, bands from various other cultures incorporate the indigenous belief systems of their respective countries into their music, lyrical content and artwork. Black metal bands from Mexico, such as Aztec Terrorism, attempt to revive the Aztec religion, while bands from Greece, such as Rotting Christ, celebrate the Greek Pagan pantheon. Sigh from Japan adapt Shinto death chants to their black metal and were one of the first Asian black metal bands to make contact with the Norwegian scene in the early 90's.[215] Regardless of the country, culture or religious framework in question, black metal tends to follow a similar pattern of religious expression: the combination of transgression, mysticism and revivalism. The framework laid out by the Satanic and Asá Trŭ factions of the Nordic scene is adapted and applied wherever black metal manifests as a means of negating, transcending and attacking secular modernity. Black metal is gaining intense popularity in Asia, Eastern Europe and Latin America; whether or not black metal will ever catch on in Sub-Saharan Africa, often the last outpost of globalization, is yet to be seen.[216]

Finding a religious framework applicable to black metal poses a difficult problem for black metalers in the United States and Canada. Being from countries largely made up of immigrants, who are even more distantly removed from their ancient past than their international counterparts, U.S and Canadian black metal must either take the easiest route (i.e. Satanism) or adopt the ancient religion of another country. Black metal is an aggressively polysemic culture,

[215] Moynihan and Soderlind , pg 66.
[216] Kahn-Harris, pg 73.

and this is doubly true for U.S. black metal that must take whatever religious and mystical subject matter it can find. The Texas-based black metal band Absu incorporates ancient Celtic, Mesopotamian and Egyptian mythology into their conceptual structure, as well as Satanism and Crowlian magik. Absu frontman Proscriptor explains his understanding of mysticism and magic:

> I look at it more as a self-worshipping amulet. I think of it not as something that can affect the physical world, but it's something more that can ward off any mortal and human and materialistic disturbances. It's basically an internal shield for the mind and an external body-armour for the body. That's the way that I look at it. It's not about casting spells and "I'm gonna turn you into a pile of ash." It's not about that, but it's about... magic is about being a self-protectant.[217]

This notion of spiritual self-defense corroborates Khan-Harris' notion of scenic boundaries and alienation. Mysticism allows participants to create space for themselves and their scene that is, ideally, safe from corruption and infiltration from outside elements.

Black metal is necessarily and unrelentingly oppositional but not in the way Dick Hebdige and Stuart Hall would have expected.[218] Black metal does not just oppose capitalism and class-based hierarchies; it opposes all notions of progress and civilization. In its pan-Nordic cultural narcissism, Nordic black metal calls into question the validity of the modern nation state, and international black metal has continued this tendency. The dissonance and abrasiveness of black metal music delegitimizes modernist notions of aesthetic judgment. Through a celebration of nature, primal emotion, violence and all things feral, black metal rejects rationalism. In its rejection of modern culture, black metal is very postmodern. While there are certainly ideological differences between Satanism and Asá Trŭ, both forms of mysticism represent a movement to negate notions of Christianity, progress and civilization. Black metal becomes part of postmodernity by celebrating *pre*-modernity. Black metal as a movement celebrates a

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[217] *Chronicles of Chaos*, 12-8-2001.
[218] Hebdige, Dick. *Subculture: the Meaning of Style*. 2006 Routledge. Hall, Stuart. *Encoding/Decoding*. 2006 Blackwell Publishing.

partially imagined "golden age" in the ancient past in stark contrast to the moderation and rationalism of mainstream culture. Black metal is essentially irrational. By placing almost exclusive emphasis on emotion, sensory experience and mysticism, black metal rejects the basic tenets of the Enlightenment. Black metal is less anti-human, as some within the scene have often asserted,[219] but rather anti-human*ism*. Pagan black metal in its various manifestations seeks to negate the entire modern era and establish a culture based on emotion, mysticism and nature rather than logic, reason and progress.

Black metal's religious attitude is an example of what Adam Parfrey has dubbed "apocalypse culture,"[220] by which he means a manifestation of the breakdown of modernist notions of progress and rationalism as well as the intensification of cultural fragmentation. Black metal looks towards the collapse of secular culture and moderate Christianity. Whereas punk criticizes capitalism and the political establishment of western democracies,[221] black metal either seeks to write the entire modern era off as a bad idea or negate the notion of progress altogether. Mysticism and black metal religious attitudes in general are an attempt to completely remove participants from the discourses of modernity. Black metal attempts to cut itself off from modern culture and has almost no interest in positive assessments of itself by outsiders. Garm, vocalist for the band Ulver, explains, "If he (the Satanist) was to set out and convert everyone to his line of thought, the world would look quite different, and he would no longer be able to touch the stars undisturbed. In my eyes, this is nothing to strive for."[222] Garm's assertion that cultural discontinuity and fragmentation is necessary in order for Satanic black metalers to "touch the stars" is indicative of black metal's desire to create a space removed from mainstream culture

[219] Moynihan and Soderlind, pgs 69-75.
[220] Parfrey, Adam. *Apocalypse Culture*. 1987, Amok Press.
[221] Hebdige, Part Four.
[222] Moynihan and Soderlind, pg 225.

and protected from infiltration. Transgression is used to create this space, and this space is used to achieve mystical transcendence.

For black metalers, religious and mystical potency translates to cultural and personal potency. Spirituality is the principal tool with which participants construct their extravagant, transgressive identities. Mysticism bridges the gap between the individual and the collective without compromising the integrity of either. Reference to a real or imagined past before the advent of Christianity bridges the gap between the past and present, as well as the self and the other, ideally transcending modernity altogether, moving directly from the pre-modern to the postmodern. Like the Khmer Rouge or Jim Jones' People's Temple, black metal attempts to create the future by escaping into the past.[223] Unlike either the Khmer Rouge or Jim Jones' People's Temple, black metal incorporates modern Satanic notions of radical individualism and a rejection of egalitarianism. The mystical experience attempts to resolve this contradiction between radical individualism and the pleasures of group identity by uniting each individual under the banner of the spirit of Satan and/or Odin and/or Nature.[224] In their daily lives, black metalers can perform their radical individualism in numerous transgressive and empowering ways, while escaping their constrictive physical/individual identities during live performances and other mystical rituals. Black metal's understanding of the past and the natural world, while sharing a variety of traits with its religious motivations, must be understood as a separate conceptual framework, which will be explored in greater detail in the next chapter.

[223] Short, Phillip. Pol Pot: Anatomy of a Nightmare, Chapter Six. 2006, Henry Holt. Kaplan, Jeffery. Radical Religion in America, pg 172. Syracuse University Press, 1997.
[224] The role of nature and folklore relating to nature in black metal will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3.

Chapter Three: My Heart, It Beats the Pulse of Ancient Times: Folklore, Nostalgia and Nature Worship In Black Metal

Introduction

Spirits and monsters associated with nature serve an important function in black metal that overlaps with many of the issues concerning religion, but constitutes a unique conceptual perspective that transcends the Satanic/Pagan dichotomy suggested in Chapter Two. Whereas Satan and myriad pagan deities are frequently seen by participants as very real corporeal entities, monsters like trolls, werewolves and elves are used by black metalers as symbolic representations of nature, power and vitality. Black metal, both as a culture and as an identifiable musical genre, originated in the Nordic countries,[225] which are largely rural, heavily forested areas of intimidating natural beauty. The majority of Norwegian black metalers are from rural towns and villages,[226] and it is impossible to overstate the significance of the Norwegian countryside in the development of black metal's cultural sensibility. Weather, forests, mountains and the ocean serve as direct representations of natural purity in black metal, whereas elves, trolls and water monsters are personifications of nature that serve a very similar function. A black metal band, such as Immortal or Borknagar, might describe a troll and a snowstorm in very similar terms. Nature is presented by black metal as an alternative to civilization. Like Christianity, cities and civilization are the manifestation of the cultural and spiritual emptiness that black metal explicitly despises.

Black metal tracks are as likely to have lyrical content concerning a mountain range as they are about Satan. Up to a point, black metalers' fixation with nature and monsters associated

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[225] Moynihan, Michael and Soderlind, Didrik. *Lords of Chaos*, pg 33. 2003 Feral House.
[226] Moynihan and Soderlind, pg 201.

with nature is a result of their immediate surroundings, but in a very important sense nature as represented in black metal is a Utopian ideal.[227] The perfect pristine forest that so many black metalers shriek about with such intense exaltation is the forest that they hope to inhabit after secular modernity has been swept away.[228] When black metalers wail reverently about the ocean, they are referring to the ocean that their Viking ancestors sailed on; the past/future that they hope to recreate. For all of its violence and misanthropy, black metal is a deeply romantic movement and this is nowhere more evident that in their anthemic hymns to nature.

In this chapter I will explain the ways in which nature is depicted in black metal as a representation of strength, purity, vitality and power. The natural environment or creature serves as a contrast to the weakness and corruption of Christianity, modernity and urbanization. A forest might be the idealized setting, and the werewolf might be the idealized being, but both represent the ideal alternative to the modern, secular human world that black metal derides above all else. Lyrics about folkloric monsters allow black metalers to work within the extreme metal tradition of horror, transgression and the abject, while grounding the subject matter in history and place. As we have seen in other respects, black metal takes aspects of extreme metal's cultural expression and modifies them to serve more specific, often more ambitious purposes. The idea of an imagined past filled with magic, vitality and cultural meaning is a notion that runs throughout black metal, informing black metalers' identity and their perception of the contemporary world.

[227] Moynihan and Soderlind, pg 203.
[228] myspace.com/wolvesinthethroneroom.

Part One: My Heart, It Beats the Pulse of Ancient Times

Death metal bands frequently make monsters like serial killers and zombies the subject matter of their music and artwork. Both of these "monsters" are distinctly modern creatures invariably contextualized in modern settings.[229] Death metal bands like Mortician, Cannibal Corpse and Macabre bellow in gruesome detail about the nocturnal activities of Jeffrey Dahmer or elaborate on the details of the impending zombie apocalypse with a heavy focus on the grotesque and the abject.[230] Black metal specifically avoids modern monsters, partially because they are traditional subject matter of death metal, but largely because they *are modern*. A black metaler from Los Angeles whom I interviewed asserted: "Zombies and serial killers are not epic. Maybe this has something to do with them being modern creations, and maybe it has something to do with them not being connected to the natural world like trolls, werewolves and other creatures are."[231] Modern monsters, being directly associated with the modern world, are too closely tied to the mundane and the everyday existence that black metalers hope to escape. The use of the term "epic," a favorite among black metalers, is very significant and telling; this term refers to something larger than life, Tolkien-esque and in opposition to mundanity.

Folkloric monsters like trolls, elves, werewolves and water monsters are a common cultural thread that runs throughout the Nordic countries and much of Germanic Europe.[232] Folkloric monsters are intrinsically linked with nature, place, and to contemporary black metalers, a forgotten pre-modern golden age. A long-time black metal scene member whom I interviewed suggested, "There's something intrinsically 'ancient' about trolls and elves, while

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[229] Moynihan and Soderlind, pgs 27-30.
[230] Purcell, pgs 170-186.
[231] 11-15-07.
[232] Orchard, Andy. *Cassell's Dictionary of Norse Myth & Legend*, pgs 136, 99, 394, 253. 2002, Cassell.

zombies and serial killers are considerably more modern phenomena, so a perceived primitivism might have something to do with it."[233] Nordic black metalers associate ancient folklore with a perceived golden age in the distant past of Northern Europe, and, somewhat ironically, contemporary black metalers outside of the Nordic countries associate the same folkloric monsters with a perceived golden age of Nordic black metal.

The use of acoustic instruments, which is largely unheard of in death metal, is almost a generic requirement of black metal. Like folktales, the use of traditional and acoustic instruments harkens back to a pre-industrialized time of cultural vitality and natural purity. Michael Akerfeldt, vocalist and lead guitarist for the Swedish extreme metal band Opeth,[234] describes their intended image as being that of "metal minstrels."[235] This depiction acknowledges their attempt to identify themselves with musicians of the past, specifically the Middle Ages. Clean vocals and acoustical instruments mixed in with abrasive, fast black metal attempts to both make the connection between black metalers with traditional, pre-modern music and present the combination of feral intensity and atmospheric melody that is one of black metal's defining features. This contrast once again reasserts black metal's desire to depict itself as a revitalization of ancient, pre-modern culture that combines hyper-masculinity, power and intensity with spiritual vitality, history and rich atmosphere.

The Finnish band Finntroll make folktales concerning trolls and their ongoing war against civilization that permeate the Nordic countries the centerpiece of their subject matter. Following the lead of Norwegian bands like Enslaved and Ulver, Finntroll attempt a marriage between

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[233] 11-01-07.
[234] Opeth, like many Swedish extreme metal bands, are difficult to classify musically. While their sound is not strictly speaking black metal, their aesthetics, themes and use of traditional Nordic folklore unmistakably link them with black metal.
[235] Decibel, February 2008.

black metal, Finnish humppa[236] music, more traditional Finnish folk music, and troll-oriented folktales. Finntroll have described their music in numerous interviews as "trollish hoedown metal,"[237] which is as good a description as any. The combination of traditional percussion instruments and keyboard manufactured accordions, fiddles, flutes and hurdy-gurdys create something that sounds like a black metal version of the Pogues, including the distinct impression that what we are listening to is, first and foremost, drinking music. Finntroll are considerably more playful and intentionally comical than their Norwegian counterparts; however, their violent anti-Christianity and ambiguous nationalism are just as real as any Norwegian band's, regardless of the partially tongue-in-cheek trollish posturing.

Stories about trolls abound throughout the Nordic countries, and an almost universal characteristic of Nordic trolls is their aversion to Christianity.[238] Finntroll take up this theme, recasting trolls as super-heroic beings of nature fighting against the "Christian plague"[239] that has weakened and enslaved their homeland. In the world of Finntroll, trolls are exaggerated, romanticized versions of pre-Christian Nordic peoples. As trolls are strong, brave and primal, Christians are weak, passive and corrupted by civilization. In the title track to their first album, *Midnattens Widunder,* lead vocalist Katla proclaims, "Fire and blood for my folk/ My sword shall thirst for blood/ Blood of Eve's weak children/ Blood of the Christian tribe." Finntroll, perhaps more overtly than any other black metal band, attempt to construct superhuman, larger-than-life personas for themselves; a kind of demonic super-hero clad in Viking garb. Finntroll

[236] A type of Finnish polka.
[237] Allmusic.com/finntroll.
[238] Orchard, pg 364.
[239] From the lyrics of RivFader, found on Finntroll's *Midnattens Widunder* album. Translated from the Swedish by someone calling himself or herself Northern Darkness. All further Finntroll English translations are also from this source.

borrow these identities directly from traditional folklore, allowing them to ground their anti-Christianity and misanthropy in tradition, place and history.

The feeling of trolls towards Christianity in traditional Nordic folklore tends to be equal parts hate and fear. Church bells in particular seem to cause consternation among trolls. In a story collected in Norway during the late nineteenth century called "the Cleft in Horje Mountain,"[240] a troll, enraged by the building of a church near his dwelling, uses his tremendous troll strength to throw a huge boulder down the mountain at the church in an attempt to destroy it. The troll misses, hitting the side of the mountain, leaving the cleft in Horje Mountain that is the story's namesake. From Iceland to the Faeroe Islands to Norway to Finland, three tendencies among trolls remain consistent: they are stupid, they are strong and they hate Christianity.[241] Stories detailing trolls' dislike of Christianity are particularly common in Iceland where stories often describe trolls as being unable to live on consecrated ground or abide the sound of church bells.[242] Versions of these stories appear all over the Nordic countries but, unlike Finntroll's version of trollishness, traditional trolls are usually defeated or driven off by the forces of Christendom. Finntroll seeks to right these thousand-year-old wrongs, taking on the roles of Finnish trolls hell-bent on spilling Christian blood as revenge for the irritation and displacement of their trollish brethren.

Traditional Nordic folklore rarely depicts trolls as either organized or under any type of leadership. Stories tend to depict trolls as living either by themselves or with a spouse but very rarely in towns or large groups.[243] In a very important sense, trolls live outside of civilization. This is the most important aspect of what they represent; creatures of wild, untamed nature,

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[240] Kvideland, Reimund and Sehmsdorf, K. Henning. *Scandinavian Folk Belief and Legend*, pg 311-312. 1988 University of Minnesota Press.
[241] Orchard, pg 364.
[242] Arnason, Jon, *Icelandic Legends*. 1995, Llanerch Publishers.
[243] Orchard, pg 364.

living outside of the light of civilization and Christianity. Finntroll celebrates this idea, while also fantasizing about what would happen if trolls collectively rose up against Christian civilization under the leadership of a great troll king. In their concept album *Jaktens Tid*,[244] Finntroll describe the troll king's ascent and bloody war against Christianity. On the track *The Story of Birth*, vocalists Somnium and Katla describe:

The mountain roars, fills me with might
This ancient God all the tribes hail
This soil, this might
That has now showed itself
The power that has promised is not denied
A spear I will forge and sharpen
The crown of the trolls shall perch on my head
The day now reigns, when I am called king.

Finntroll's lyrics as shown by the examples given in this chapter are particularly concerned with notions of homeland, strength and unity. They are not an openly fascist or racist band, but their lyrics often betray an affinity for fascistic themes and ideas that may or may not be intentional. *Jaktens Tid* tells the story of the rise and eventual triumph of a troll king who leads the trolls in a great war against the forces of Christianity. The album contains numerous references to soil, strength, homeland and blood, both in a literal sense and in a racial sense. While Finntroll did not, in all likelihood, intend for *Jaktens Tid* to have fascistic overtones, such overtones are not difficult to find for anyone wanting to look for them. Finntroll try to retain and glorify the trolls' strength and feral character while making them less easily fooled and taken advantage of by the more civilized forces of Christianity. The representation of trolls in traditional Nordic folklore as lonely, isolated, stupid monsters is the principal difference between traditional stories and Finntoll's belligerent fantasies. In traditional folklore, as can be seen from folktale collections such as Arnason's and Kvideland's, trolls are equally feared and laughed at.

[244] "Age of the Hunt."

They are invariably tricked, robbed, killed or driven away. Finntroll gives the trolls the lead role in the story, rather than the farm boy or the clergyman, as well as the righteous high-ground.

Finntroll's folkloric interests, like the Swedish language they sing in, are very much in the Scandinavian tradition. Stories about trolls are not as common in Finnish traditions as they are in the other Nordic countries. The stories and motifs Finntroll seem to be familiar with are primarily of Swedish and Norwegian origin. Finnish stories emphasize trolls' use of magic and trickery and deemphasize their strength and hatred of Christianity.[245] Finntroll is a response to both the Scandinavian folktale tradition and the black metal tradition. For all of their nationalistic posturing, Finntroll are not particularly Finnish. You will not find anything from the Kalevala in Finntroll's lyrics and very little from stories specifically associated with Finland. Finntroll primarily adopt the character of the troll, borrow various motifs from more widespread stories and adapt these elements to a fantasy world of their own creation.

The Norwegian band Ulver[246] make use of folktales and folk music in a less cartoonish way than Finntroll. Fronted by singer Garm,[247] Ulver's first three albums exhibit a musical and thematic diversity rarely seen in the black metal world.[248] Although Ulver are outspokenly Satanic, their Satanism veers much closer to the Church of Satan school of Satanism than the more literal devil worship espoused by bands like Mayhem and Gorgoroth. Ulver concern themselves with folktales and motifs that emphasize carnality, nature and Nordic folklore's more feral manifestations.[249] Much of Ulver's music involves chanting, group vocal harmonies and acoustic music that is, by mainstream standards, quite beautiful, although these moments are

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[245] Orchard, pg 364.
[246] "The Wolves" in Norwegian.
[247] Garm is a great, monstrous dog discussed in the Eddas. See *Cassell's Dictionary of Norse Myth &Legend*, pg 124-125. 2002, Cassell.
[248] allmusic.com/ulver.
[249] Orchard, pg 394.

contrasted with equally common passages of cacophonous wailing and shrieking more akin to Darkthrone. Ulver's use of Nordic folklore articulates the central theme of their music, and indeed, one of the central themes of black metal as a movement: contemporary humanity's conflict between nature and civilization.

Ulver's 1994 album *Bergtatt: Et Eventyr i 5 Capitler*[250] was a watershed moment for Norwegian black metal both musically and thematically. Bergtatt is a concept album, with each of the album's five tracks telling one part of the traditional Nordic folktale about the elves luring a farm girl into the mountains and making her one of them.[251] The five "chapters" tell the story of a farm girl hearing the elves calling her from the mountains, getting lost in the woods and eventually being swallowed under the mountains and taken to elf land.[252] The music ranges from haunting atmospheric passages that sound similar to extra-metal influences like Dead Can Dance or Flying Saucer Attack to traditional Norwegian folk music to brutal, buzzing, Darkthrone-esque black metal, often with no transition between styles whatsoever. Sounds of someone running through the forest, snapping tree limbs and gasping for breath are interspersed throughout. Ulver's attempt to adapt a traditional Nordic folktale motif to a black metal concept album was ambitious and unique in 1994. Innumerable black metal bands have mimicked both the musical style and the folktale concept album since, but rarely with the affect or disturbing beauty of *Bergtatt*. Ulver revive the traditional folktale, maintaining its story form, and contextualize it within a moment in black metal in which the scene was still establishing its borders and sense of identity. *Bergtatt* was, and remains, a successful attempt to characterize black metal as part of a continuation of the oral folktale tradition. Making traditional Nordic

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[250] "Mountain-taken: A Fairy-Tale in 5 Chapters."
[251] See Arnason, Jon. *Icelandic Legends*. Also Thorwald Chritiansen, Reidar. *Folktales of Norway.* 1964, University of Chicago Press.
[252] Unfortunately all of the lyrics are in a very archaic Norwegian dialect and I was unable to find a translation. My summery is taken from liner notes and various album reviews. See allmusic.com.

folktales the focal point of their lyrical content, and folk music an integral part of their instrumentation, Ulver negates the contemporary in favor of the antiquated. Like Asá Trŭ, the glorification of traditional folklore is an attempt to escape the present by reviving the past.

Ulver's second album, *Kveldssanger*,[253] is a completely acoustic, mostly instrumental folk album of original material. Nordic folk-music is dominated by the fiddle, and that instrument's absence is conspicuous on *Kveldssanger*. Mostly consisting of acoustic guitars, flutes, cello and Ulver's signature group harmonies, *Kveldssanger* is less a representation of traditional folk music and more an attempt to create dark, pretty, acoustic music akin to psychedelic acid-folk from the 1960's.[254]

Ulver's third album, *Nattens Madrigal,*[255] is principally concerned with wolves and werewolves. Stories concerning both of these creatures are common throughout Northern Europe and in Norway in particular.[256] Unlike the first two albums, some of *Nattens Madrigal's* lyrics have been translated into English. The lyrics of the song *Wolf and Fear* go as follows:

> The beast below bestowed on him a gift
> And by magic he to wolf was bound
> No more was he a slave to God
> At midnight treading on hallow grave.[257]

These lyrics situate the figure of the werewolf in a Satanic context, the "beast below" almost certainly being Satan, while elaborating on the ancient Nordic tradition of a spiritual relationship between humanity and wolves.[258] Snorri describes berserks as being associated with wolves and their ecstatic battle frenzy as particularly lupine in character. The relationship between wolves, Odin and battle-frenzy frequently shows up in Snorri's Edda and in various

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[253] "Night Songs."
[254] Like *Bergtatt*, the lyrics of *Kveldssanger* have not been translated into English.
[255] Madrigal of the Night. A Madrigal is a type of traditional folk-song.
[256] Thorwald Chritiansen, Reidar. *Folktales of Norway.* Kvideland and Sehmsdorf, *Scandinavian Folk Belief and Legend*. 1988 University of Minnesota.
[257] www.darklyrics.com/lyrics/ulver/themadrigalofthenighteighthymnestothewolfinman.html#1.
[258] Orchard, pgs 58-59.

Sagas.[259] It is likely that this association was the proto-type for later folktales about werewolves. In *Nattens Madrigal*, Ulver celebrate this motif while resituating it within a black metal/Satanic context.

The notion of going berserk, or shape-shifting, is a powerful one for black metalers. Deleuze and Guattari write:

> But we are not interested in characteristics; what interests us are modes of expansion, propagation, occupation, contagion, peopling. I am legion. The Wolf-Man fascinated by several wolves watching him. What would a lone wolf be? Or a whale, a louse, a rat, a fly? Beelzebub is the Devil, but the Devil as lord of the flies. The wolf is not fundamentally a characteristic or a certain number of characteristics; it is a wolfing. The louse is a lousing and so on. What is a cry independent of the population it appeals to or takes as its witness?[260]

Black metal is fixated with notions of self, group and identity. The wolf and the werewolf are particularly potent symbols of the rejection of humanity that black metal seeks to achieve. As Deleuze and Guattari so vividly illustrate, the notion of a singular wolf, or wolf individuality, is a misnomer. By appealing to notions of animalism, wolfishness and the feral, black metalers attempt to simultaneously resolve the problems of herd mentality and constrictive notions of singular, isolated selfhood. By attempting to achieve, in Nietzsche's words, the "self-overcoming of man,"[261] black metalers embrace their own multiplicity and establish a more complex and nuanced notion of self than is provided by the simple myself/other or individual/group dichotomies. By embracing the irrational and identifying themselves with symbols of primal, animalistic power, black metalers attempt to resolve the problems of modernity associated with singular identities and binary oppositions.

The former Soviet Block in Eastern Europe has seen an extreme metal renaissance since the fall of communism, much of it being black metal with heavy emphasis on place, tradition and

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[259] Orchard, pgs 394-395.
[260] Deleuze and Guattari, pg 239.
[261] Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, pg 201. Translated by Walter Kaufmann. 1966, Vintage Books.

the ancient, Pagan past.[262] Many of the Eastern European black metal bands belong to the NSBM camp (National Socialist Black Metal, a subject I will discuss in greater detail in Chapter Four), with traditional folklore and folklife being a primary subject for their lyrics. Indigenous folk music, traditional vocal styles, folktale motifs and descriptions of traditional ways of life are ubiquitous subjects among Eastern European black metalers. Eastern European bands take the Norwegian model of black metal and modify it to suit an Eastern European context. As a result, Eastern European black metal has one foot planted firmly in the tradition of Nordic black metal and the other in a unique sound and aesthetic all their own as a result of their use of indigenous folk music and folk culture.

The Ukrainian black metal band Nokturnal Mortum valorize traditional Ukrainian rural life, music and folklore in their music with a fantastical, idealized re-imagined notion of what life in their homeland was like a thousand years ago. Like the Nordic black metalers who came before them, Nokturnal Mortum attempt to construct a fantasy world in place of the brutal realities of medieval life to serve as an imagined past to return to. The track *The Forgotten Ages of Victories* describes the purity, bravery and cultural vitality that Nokturnal Mortum believe existed in the ancient past:

> His face covered with wrinkles like waterless earth
> shined with life as in his youth.
> And his tale was drifted through the time
> to distant faraways of those days.
> When the steel was like continuation of the hand
> and the warriors were not afraid of their enemies' power -
> then moon was shining brighter and sun warmed more times than nowadays.
> The forest has been lighted by thousand of bonfires,
> it have been seen that celebration has begun,
> and singing drowned the noise of the wind
> but (the) elder continued this tale.

[262] Moynihan and Soderlind, pg 321.

> When the valor and the honor was valued over lie and hypocrisy,
> when the pride and the eminence
> was valued over the slavery and the cowardice.[263]

This passage evokes the notion of a time of heroism, tradition and natural splendor that existed prior to the advent of both Christianity and Communism. In this passage we are told that the "moon was shining brighter," and, "warriors were not afraid of their enemies' power." Nokturnal Mortum are nostalgic for a time before the environmental degradation, political impotence and humiliating poverty that has been all that they have known in their lifetime. Unlike Nordic black metalers, Ukrainians have actually experienced cultural repression and political unrest. If black metal is a response to the inadequacies and failures of modernity, it should come as no surprise that the former Soviet block has seen a proliferation of black metal bands.

Images regarding the rekindling of a fire, the remembering of forgotten songs and other notions evoking rebirth are ubiquitous in black metal all over the world.[264] The concept of a "reawakening" is central to the black metal fixation with traditional folklore. Traditional monsters, like the corpse-painted monstrosities that black metalers often make themselves into, are seen as pure, natural beings filled with life and vitality.[265] Traditional folklore is used both as an appeal to pre-modern times and as a symbol of the irrational, feral "wolfing" that Deleuze and Guattari associate with multiplicity. Black metalers construct identity in direct reference to notions of ancestral lineage, tradition and the multiplicity that such a notion of identity implies. Mattias Gardell describes this notion of a "religion of the blood"[266] at length but does not fully

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[263] *Gates of the Blasphemous Fire*, *The Forgotten Ages of Victories*, 1998. Translated by Darklyrics.com.
[264] Moynihan and Soderlind, pgs 195-204.
[265] Moynihan and Soderlind, pgs 207-212.
[266] Gardell, pg 165.

realize the rejection of singular identity that this notion implies. Black metalers posit themselves as being living microcosms of their ancestral culture; as carrying within themselves memories of the ancient past that are intrinsic to their consciousness. As we saw in Chapter Two, this notion is articulated in the lyrics to Emperor's *I am the Black Wizards*: "My wizards are many but their essence is mine….I am them." Black metal resolves the conflict between "self" and "other" by embracing the notion of each participant being a multiplicity inseparably linked to his/her ancestors, the past and the vitality that black metalers believe existed there.

Part Two: Below the Misty Mountains Cold: Black Metal and Tolkien

The writings of J.R.R. Tolkien have been nearly as influential as traditional folklore on black metal culture. Tolkien was a philologist with a particular interest in the languages, folklore and culture of northern Europe, and these interests played a pivotal role in inspiring Tolkien's fantasy world.[267] Indeed, the name for his world, Middle Earth, was taken directly from Norse mythology, as are a multitude of place names, character, motifs and images that make Tolkien's work so evocative.[268] From the earliest days of Norwegian black metal, Tolkien's work served to enhance, articulate and in many respects replace the messy realities of ancient Nordic culture for a group of imaginative young Norwegians who were looking for a magical world to escape into. Tolkien's orcs in particular provided a model for the monstrous, super-human, war-like beasties that black metalers continue to emulate.[269] Tolkien's world is the perfect imagined past that black metalers wish to superimpose over the Viking age. Middle Earth provides a fantastic

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[267] Shippey, Tom. *The Road to Middle Earth: How J.R.R. Tolkien Created a New Mythology*, Chapter One. 2003, Houghton Mifflin.
[268] Jones, Leslie Ellen. *Myth and Middle Earth*, pgs 13-16. 2002, Cold Springs Press.
[269] See Picture 1.

paradigm for an attractive "evil" in the form of the orcs and Sauron, and a rich romantic setting that resembles an idealized Northern Europe. Tolkien's world allows black metalers to take the aspects of Old Norse mythology and traditional folklore that they find engaging and discard the aspects that they find inconvenient, bookish or incomprehensible.

Varg Vikernes, the only member of Burzum, church burner and Neo-Nazi extraordinaire, was one of the earliest black metalers to make the connection between black metal and Tolkien. The name Burzum comes from Tolkien, Burzum meaning "excessive darkness" in Orcish.[270] Burzum's first incarnation was dubbed Uruk-Hai, a band of mutant orcs bred by the evil wizard Saruman in *Lord of the Rings*. Vikernes' early pseudonym, Count Grishnackh, was borrowed from Tolkien, Grishnackh being a particularly belligerent Uruk-Hai.[271] Vikernes used several scenes from Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* as subject matter for Burzum songs and albums, including the cover of his 1993 album *Det Som Engang Var* which was inspired by the gates to the evil kingdom of Mordor.[272] It is significant that Vikernes never uses Tolkien's protagonists as subject matter; the evil, violent, misanthropic characters are his exclusive interest. Tolkien's evil characters allow Vikernes to combine transgression, the abject, and imagery consistent with Satanism in his vaguely medieval fantasy world. Identification with evil characters like the orcs, the Ringwraiths and wargs allow black metalers to maintain the inversion of mainstream values popular among Satanists (which Vikernes was at the time), while also allowing them access to Tolkien's Viking-inspired aesthetic.

As are the majority of his comments on any subject, Vikernes' interpretation of Tolkien is idiosyncratic, but illuminate black metal's conception of itself. In an interview with Moynihan and Søderlind, Vikernes explains:

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[270]Moynihan and Søderlind, pg 159.
[271] Tyler, J.E.A. *The Complete Tolkien Companion*, pg 292. 2004, Thomas Dunn Books.
[272] Tyler, pg 433. See Picture 2.

An Uruk-Hai is the typical berserker in the Tolkien stories. There's a lot of Norse mythology in Tolkien. We were drawn to Sauron and his lot, and not the hobbits, those stupid little dwarves. I hate dwarves and elves. The elves are fair, but typically Jewish – arrogant, saying, 'we are the chosen ones.' So I don't like them. But you have Barad-dur, the tower of Sauron, and you have Hlidhskjalf, the tower of Odin; you have Sauron's all-seeing-eye, and then Odin's one eye; the ring of power and Odin's ring Drapnir; the trolls are like typical berserkers, big huge guys who went berserk, and the Uruk-Hai are like the Ulfhedhnar, the wolfcoats. The wolf element is typically heathen. So I sympathize with Sauron.[273]

While Vikernes' explanation of the parallels between Norse mythology and Tolkien are certainly true, his acceptance of the "evil" polarity in Tolkien's world is unique. As we have seen with devil worshiping black metalers, Vikernes retains the "good vs. evil" dichotomy, accepting in this case the men, dwarves and elves as being good and the hosts of Sauron as being evil, but placing his allegiance with evil. This quotation illustrates a common trope among black metalers: the belief in a romantic evil.

Gorgoroth also take their name from Tolkien, Gorgoroth being a particularly unpleasant region of Mordor, the evil domain of Sauron.[274] Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* is largely inspired by Ragnarök in Norse mythology, the battle at the end of time's cycle in which the Gods battle Loki and the giants, the world being destroyed in the process and reborn anew afterwards.[275] This scenario provides a principal inspiration for Tolkien's War of the Rings, and the activity that constitutes *The Lord of the Rings*.[276] As we have seen in Chapter Two, Ragnarök is also a primary subject for black metal bands and it is often difficult to assess when black metalers are referencing Norse mythology and when black metalers are referencing Tolkien referencing Norse mythology. Gorgoroth are particularly interested in war, and many hard-line black metalers see themselves engaged in a war against secular modernity. Tolkien's evil, Satanic characters are one of black metal's chief inspirations for their fantasies of war, genocide and

[273] Moynihan and Søderlind, pg 158.
[274] Tyler, pg 284.
[275] Orchard, pg 284.
[276] Shippey, pg 156.

extravagant identity. Frequently, black metal garb looks less like actual Viking-age dress than like Tolkien's description of orcs.[277] Black metalers frequently seem to make little distinction between medieval Nordic folklore and *The Lord of the Rings*.

The Finnish black metal one-man "band" Summoning has made Tolkien the almost exclusive subject of his rather prolific work. Album titles include *Minas Morgul*, the tower of the Nazgul,[278] *Lugbûrz*, the "dark tower" of Sauron,[279] and *Dol Guldur*, another haunt of Sauron's.[280] Summoning, as can be seen from this list, is, like Vikernes, also particularly interested in Tolkien's evil characters. Unlike Vikernes, Summoning borrow lyrics from Tolkien's songs to incorporate into his own lyrics and music. The lyrics to *Lugburz* are as follows:

Cold be hand and heart and bone,
and cold be sleep under stone: never more to wake
on stony bed, never, till the sun fails
and the moon is dead.

In the black wind the stars shall die,
and still on gold here let them lie,
till the dark lord lifts his hand
over dead sea and withered land.[281]

When the winter first begins to bite
and stones crack in the frosty night,
when pools are black and trees are bare,
it is evil in the wild to fare.[282]

To lay down my will upon the Land, Lugbûrz

No sound disturbs this place of blackened souls
This winter walls of stone and ice behold thy might
Again I'm kneeling down to hear these strange tunes of war

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[277] See Picture 3.
[278] Taylor, pg 426.
[279] Taylor, pg 389.
[280] Taylor, pg 147.
[281] Tolkien, J.R.R. *The Fellowship of the Ring*, pg 195. 1965, Ballentine Books.
[282] Tolkien, pg 357.

Night, oh beloved night, your wisdom floats into my mind,
and forms my thoughts of Middle-Earth
to build up a new mighty empire

The first three sections of this passage are taken directly from *The Lord of the Rings*. Beginning with the line, "To lay down my will upon the land, Lugbûrz" onward, are original lyrics by Summoning. Tolkien's apocalyptic visions of Mordor and the destruction that would follow Sauron's triumph are inverted by Summoning to describe a romantic, quasi-Arctic wasteland. Summoning borrows Tolkien's fearful descriptions of evil but converts those images to black metal's romantic conception of evil. The ending lines of the song comment on Summoning's enjoyment at "kneeling down to hear these strange tunes of war" which "forms my thoughts of Middle-Earth." In these last lines, Summoning comments on his enjoyment of *The Lord of the Rings* and the clearly romantic, almost transcendental pleasure available therein.

Combining Tolkien's lyrics in this manner with original lyrics is a practice similar to fan fiction; a reworking of the original text that incorporates the reader's interests and ambitions. Henry Jenkins describes this practice: "Because popular narratives often fail to satisfy, fans must struggle with them, to try to articulate to themselves and to others unrealized possibilities within the original works."[283] Tolkien is romantic, but not transgressive. The orcs are sufficiently Satanic, but Tolkien's heroes are gentle hobbits and relatively normal humans. Black metalers get around this with an aggressive alternate reading of Tolkien that, like their reading of the Bible, turns the bad guys into the good guys and vice versa. This tactic appeals to the Satanic faction of black metal, while also appealing to black metal's love of Nordic folklore. Tolkien's world serves as the romantic, magical, fantastical universe that black metalers want the Viking

[283] Jenkins, Henry. Textual Poachers, Introduction, pg 508.

age to have been. Tolkien is certainly not modern, nor is he strictly speaking medieval; to black metalers he is outside of history.

Part. 3: I Will Lay Down My Bones Among the Rocks and Roots: Nature Worship in Black Metal.

No theme, trope or lyrical fixation is more pronounced within international black metal than natural environments.[284] Nature as lyrical subject matter for both album art and ambient sounds interspersed into the music is one of the primary elements that makes black metal unique. A death metal band would *never* sing an entire song about how hard it is snowing or how much they like the mountains. Themes of nature permeate all subgenres of black metal all over the world and speak to black metal's conception of itself as "primitive" and "animalistic." What are wolves howling at if not the moon? Indeed, this image of the wolf howling at the moon is indicative of black metal's self-image, speaking to black metal's desire to be animalistic, violent and bestial as well as being indissolubly linked with the natural world.[285] Nature, as Levi-Strauss tells us, is the binary opposite of culture or, as black metalers see it, civilization.[286] Black metal's genius is often in its simplicity; what better way to reject society than to embrace the wilderness? What is more violent and cruel than an arctic blizzard? What is more personal than one's immediate surroundings? Black metalers yowl with lupine enthusiasm about the beauty of the forest, the majesty of the mountains and the endless sea with unmistakable sincerity which, while far more appealing than Satanism to the majority of listeners, serves a very similar purpose.

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[284] Moynihan and Soderlind, pgs 199-203.
[285] See picture 4.
[286] Leach, Edmund. *Lévi-Strauss*, pgs 21-35. 1970, Fontana.

Norwegian black metal stalwarts Immortal have made their hymns to nature their primary lyrical subject, as well as setting a standard for such material in the international scene. An Oslo radio DJ quips to Sam Dunn in his documentary *Metal: a Headbanger's Journey*, "The Eskimos have twelve words for snow, but Immortal have thirteen." Although they were one of the earliest bands to emerge from the Norwegian scene, Immortal are not a Satanic band. Immortal's lack of enthusiasm for the devil was frowned upon in the Norwegian scene at that time,[287] and a conceptual void existed that was filled by a spiritual reverence for nature. Their 1992 full-length debut, *Diabolical Full Moon Mysticism*, contains such wintry titles as *The Call of the Wintermoon*, *Cryptic Winterstorms*, *Cold Winds of Funeral Dust*, and *A Perfect Vision of a Rising Northland*. The natural environments that Immortal vocalize about are explicitly Nordic, grounding their veneration in a specific place.

Immortal, like their colleagues of other religious persuasions, place a heavy emphasis on themes of apocalypse and rebirth. The track *Nebular Raven's Winter* from the 1997 album *Blizzard Beasts* describes an icy apocalypse:

> Damnation calls
> Final blasts close the earth
> Immortal victory
> Winter's bane upon the masses
> Snow spiraling towards auroral clouds
> Clear nebulous visions sight
> Soulwinds fall into the dark ice realms
> Where you now reach far.
>
> Blackwinged ravens cry for tragedies to come
> Lurking with snowfall
> By doom they drag the robe of ice
> Frozen of heart you now reach far.
>
> In the nebular raven's winter
> Winds are known from where they blow

[287] Moynihan and Soderlind, pgs 33-45.

Nebular raven's winter
Strength comes from us above.

In this passage, Immortal give ice, wind and snow a distinctly mystical quality. Satanic and Heathen bands ululate about the intoxicating vengeance of Satan or the impending return of Odin, and Immortal speak in very similar terms about the destructive, violent manifestations of nature. By embracing the uncontrollable aspects of their immediate environment, Immortal reject the weakness and mundanity of contemporary Norwegian culture while retaining a powerful sense of place and identity. In this way, Immortal perform the delicate balancing act of weighing black metal's distain of mainstream culture against its reverence for its environment as successfully as anyone.

Immortal are one of the few "beyond reproach" bands in black metal. They have international respect that comes from being a founding band of the Norwegian scene,[288] as well as a musical consistency rarely seen in metal. In the October 2007 issue of *Decibel* magazine, Immortal's *In the Heart of Winter* was inducted into the Decibel Hall of Fame, a list of the greatest extreme metal albums of all time. In the subsequent interview, journalist J. Bennett comments, "Many Scandinavian bands pay tribute to their frozen surroundings either lyrically or visually, but Immortal seem nearly synonymous with the aesthetics of a Norwegian winter. It is almost impossible to think of the band without also thinking of some whitewashed, frostbitten landscape." Guitarist/vocalist Demonaz replies, "I would never try to write lyrics inspired by something or somewhere else."[289] As hostile to mainstream Norwegian culture as black metal clearly is, they are also indelibly tied to their environment. This apparent contradiction is resolved by the rejection of modern urban life and the embrace of violent, unencumbered nature.

[288] Moynihan and Soderlind, pgs 64-68.
[289] *Decibel*, Oct 2007.

The United States has become one of the leading producers of black metal in the last five years, with a number of bands from rural parts of the country placing environment and nature at the center of their ideology. While the contemporary U.S. bands are often less Satanic than their European counterparts, they emphasize general misanthropy and a love for nature; ideas they frequently equate with one another. Californian one-man-band Xasther describes what he likes to do in his spare time:

> There's not much to do: Sometimes I take walks in areas where there aren't many people….If I could, I would do some leisurely traveling to get out once in a while, 'cause I'm more or less a hermit due to being fed up with city people and all…but the rare 'vacations' I take are about 70 miles north from where you are, Sonoma, CA, to be more precise; the Forestville, Monte Rio, Gurneville area along the Russian River.[290]

Contemporary black metal bands, particularly those outside of the Nordic countries, must pay a certain amount of tribute to black metal orthodoxy while also avoiding mimicry or being a "poser." Professing a love for the redwood forests and rural areas of Northern California is an effective way of achieving this, allowing Xasther to assert claim to black metal's rejection of modernity while grounding that rejection in a specific place, in this case California.

Wolves in the Throne Room, from Olympia, Washington, place even more emphasis on nature and their environment than Xasther, incorporating ecological nature worship and open distain for modernity into their ideology. Wolves in the Throne Room's Myspace page explains:

> We play music that is inspired and informed by the tribal war-spirit found in Burzum; Our roots in the underground punk scene; deep ecology and eco-spirituality; eco-feminism; the study of myth, religion and magick; our own personal struggles to create a stronghold in this ugly and banal world, each in our own way. The important thing about black metal is that it expressed a pure cry for the utter destruction of the modern world – it is a cry of sorrow, hopelessness and pain. The "Wildman" that is represented by the corpsepainted wraith is best seen as the larvae of a being on the path to redemption.[291]

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[290] Maelstrom, Issue 11.
[291] Link to Wolves in the Throne Room's Myspace Blog: http://blog.myspace.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=blog.view&friendID=10894259&blogID=348040259.

Wolves in the Throne Room articulate, perhaps better than any other black metal band, their desire to reject secular urban modernity and escape back into an imagined past of purity and spiritual power. References to anarcho/underground punk and eco-feminism would never be mentioned in the Norwegian scene, but they fit nicely into the band's optimistic worldview of a post-apocalyptic, eco-friendly future. Wolves in the Throne Room's reference to the "Wildman that is represented by the corpsepainted wraith" as "a being on the path to redemption" expresses the black metal conviction that black metalers are natural, feral, primitive beings that represents true humanity in its purest form.

Musically and visually, Wolves in the Throne Room attempt to represent the cold, rainy, foggy beauty that is the rural Pacific Northwest. Their album art vacillates between blurry, foggy pictures of forestscapes and pictures of the band communing with nature and presenting themselves as, in Opeth's terms, "metal minstrels."[292] In interviews, Wolves in the Throne express the importance of farming and subsistence horticulture as a means of combating the evils of modernity.[293] The ecological wing of black metal has precedents in both the 60's counter-culture and the leftist-punk scene, but when placed in a black metal context it takes on religious and anti-modernist aspects that are largely absent from these other two subcultures. The motivation in black metal is not to "drop out" of society but rather to transform the self into a new/old version of humanity that back metalers believe is empowered, violent and indissolubly linked to the harshness and amorality of nature.

Wolves in the Throne Room's most recent album, *the Two Hunters*, tells the allegorical story of a "Fell Rider" who subjugates nature, turning the world into a desolate wasteland. The

[292] See Wolves in the Throne Room Pictures.
[293] blog.myspace.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=blog.view&friendID=10894259&blogID=348040259.

lyrics to the second track, “the Cleansing,” describe the speaker’s escape from the rider’s destruction into the wilderness:

> Yes, to the darkest place that we know
> Outside of the rider's domain
> To the heart of the wood
> To the hidden places beyond the briar thickets.
>
> Bathe in the clear cold stream
> Fresh water from the unsullied endless spring that flows from the mountain
> We will sing the most ancient song
> Spark the fire upon dry tinder.

Here, Wolves in the Throne Room speak of retreating into nature; away from the wanton destruction of the modern world, a.k.a. “the Fell Rider.” *The Two Hunters’* conclusion, the eighteen-minute-long epic *I Will Lay Down My Bones Among the Rocks and Roots*, describes the triumph of nature and the birth of a new world sans modernity:

> The torment has ended
> the beast has done his work
> Great fires rage outside of this wooded sanctuary.
>
> But soon they will be quenched by a purifying rain
> the embers of the ceremonial fire burn to ash
> A new warmth stirs within the center of the earth
> I am alone here no more.
>
> The wood is filled with the sounds of wildness
> The songs of birds fill the forest on this new morning
> This will be my new home
> Deep within the most sacred grove
> the sun god is born anew.
>
> I will lay down my bones among the rocks and roots of the deepest
> hollow next to the streambed
> The quiet hum of the earth's dreaming is my new song
> When I awake, the world will be born anew.

This idyllic, optimistic vision of a new world liberated from pollution, spiritual emptiness and urbanization has its roots in the Nordic black metal fixation with Ragnarök but places the

notion of apocalypse and rebirth into an ecological and less Eurocentric context. Wolves in the Throne Room continue the black metal tradition of denouncing modern, secular culture and glorifying nature, while rejecting the alienating discourses of Satanism, nationalism and neo-Nazism.

Conclusion: Into the Mighty Forest

Discourses concerning nature, folkloric monsters and an idealized past in which both nature and the natural being could attain their perfection permeate all types of black metal all over the world. These themes directly address the perceived failures of modernity by creating an image of an alternative to modernity. Forests, mountains, snow, trolls and elves are all presented as representations of an uncontrollable, eternal representation of pure nature that has been eclipsed by what black metalers perceive to be the ugliness, self-destruction and spiritual emptiness of modernity. The werewolf is the strong, empowered black metaler in touch with nature and his primal being.[294] The howling, uncontrollable snowstorm represents nature unhindered by the arrogance of science, secularism and urbanization.[295] Nature represents the living past; the truth of humanity and existence that black metalers feel is denied by modern culture.

Black metal attempts to reconcile the contradictions of singular and collective identities within a scene that both glorifies hyper-individuality and revels in the pleasures of group identity by embracing the notion of an ancestral spirit dwelling within each participant that links him or her to the distant past and the idealized future beyond modernity. In this way, black metalers

[294] Moynihan and Søderlind, pgs 207-212.
[295] Moynihan and Søderlind, pgs 200-201.

attain group identity through introspection. As Garm, vocalist for Ulver, Borknagar and Arcturus, bellows on the Borknagar track *The Eye of Odin*, "My heart, it beats the pulse of ancient times!" This notion of an internalized past preserved in the blood connotes the esoteric occult theories of Nazism,[296] but black metal's reworking of this concept is more far-reaching because it is often not exclusive to race or culture; black metalers achieve this inner consciousness through active introspection, mysticism and communion with nature. The notion that the past is a mystical space dwelling within the individual is repeated indefinitely by black metalers in songs and interviews, informing black metal identity in an indispensable way. An idealized past, indissolubly linked with nature and infused within the individual as an ancestral memory, serves as an antidote to the frustrations of mundanity and everyday life.

The distant past and nature are seen as virtually one and the same thing in black metal. The first step in overcoming the inadequacy of modernity is communion with nature. Wolves in the Throne Room's parting words in their interview with *Mortem* articulate this idea:

> As a last word I would like to urge those who listen to black metal to see it as a path to deeper spirituality and healing. We are all angry and miserable because the world has become so ugly. Black metal does not need to revel in this hate, for the hatred is only a starting point. It is the tantrum of a child. Through growth and struggle, we can achieve transcendence and touch an ancient spirituality.[297]

Wolves in the Throne Room describe a spirituality based on the rejection of the modern world and secular humanism and an embrace of nature and the mystical experience. The link between an ancient, spiritually potent past and a mystical relationship with nature allows black metalers to create a metaphysical space that provides the cultural and spiritual vitality that they find lacking in mainstream culture. The primary ideological drive behind black metal music and

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[296] Angebert, Jean-Michel. The Occult History of the Third Reich, Chapter One. 1974, McMillan Publishing.
[297] *Mortem*, 12-20-2007.

culture is the belief that, as Wolves in the Throne Room assert, "we can achieve transcendence and touch an ancient spirituality."

Norway is a fitting place for international black metal to find its lineage, being almost synonymous with vast forests, deep, cold fjords and intimidating mountains. The notion of nature as the antonym of modern civilization resonates with all of the black metal musicians and scene members that I have spoken with. One black metal enthusiast whom I interviewed stated:

> A common thread throughout black metal is a rejection of modern man. There is a general consensus in the black metal scene that society today creates a spiritually weak, superficial, and materialistic humanity. The iconography of wilderness is a symbolic rejection of this. Wild nature stands in opposition to modern mediocrity. Anyone who has spent time in real wilderness can attest to its profound and mystical power. The wild world represents a deep, timeless truth next to which the petty economics and commercial concerns of cities and suburbs seem meaningless. It is no coincidence that black metal began in Norway, where access to untamed wilderness is ubiquitous.[298]

This notion that nature contains a "profound and mystical power" runs through all subgenres and scenes in the black metal worlds. A Turkish black metal scene member whom I interviewed responded to my question regarding why black metal started in Norway by saying, "They have the best nature in their countries."[299] Black metal's fixation with nature is unique in the metal world. Notions of mysticism and spiritual transcendence are indelibly connected with black metal's love of nature. The belief that communion with nature connects participants with a "timeless truth" speaks to black metal's desire to escape constricting notions of singular identity and connect with a vital, eternal past in opposition to modernity.

Black metal requires an ideological reinforcement above and beyond the shock tactics and puerile blasphemy common in other form of metal. A spiritual reverence for nature and a belief in an unspoiled, pre-industrial "golden age" that nature represents, serves this ideological

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[298] Oct-15-2007.
[299] Nov-2-2007.

function, sometimes in combination with other religious and political doctrines, sometimes by itself. A black metal fan whom I interviewed explained:

> And this goes back to the whole Nietzsche/Nihilism stuff: there is no truth except nature. I have read interviews where they say, you know, walking through a Norwegian forest at night…there is just this aura there. It is just very….mystical, I guess. Especially with like, you know, Immortal. They have that evil, with the spikes and the corpse-paint and all that, but you can definitely tell there is more influence from nature than like a band that sings about Satan or something.[300]

Mysticism associated with nature provides one of the primary ideological reinforcements that gives black metal its semiotic impact and distinguishes it from any other genre of metal. Nature is linked with the past, through either Tolkien or traditional folklore, to create an alternative to the contemporary and the mundane.

Black metal is an ideological movement that seeks to overcome the banality, ugliness and lackadaisical spirituality that participants associate with modernity. Its rage purports to be directed not at one's parents or other authority figures but at the modern world in general. As Wolves in the Throne Room assert:

> When one listens to our music, it is clear that we are entranced by the awe that we feel when we touch the power and majesty of the natural world. It is a healing force in our lives. Our music is informed by deep ecology and eco-psychology specifically the notion that the pain we feel is directly linked to our loss of connection with the rhythms and energies of the natural world, a world that we are genetically and spiritually programmed to exist within. Our self imposed exile from the natural world around us, physically, spiritually and culturally, is the force that allows humanity to engage in the psychopathic destruction of the very life-systems that sustain us. Black Metal is the complete rejection of the cultural systems that allow this alienation to exist; a hopeless and miserable sound, because BM posits no alternative, no possibility for redemption. If Burzum is the sound of complete alienation and hopelessness, our music reflects a glimmer of salvation and hope. In my life, I am moving closer to the ability to hear a deep and ancient song this hope is reflected in our music.[301]

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[300] Nov-13-07.
[301] *Unrestrained!* May 2007.

Black metal is a critique of contemporary humanity; an assertion that something fundamental has been lost. For all its misanthropy, black metal often betrays a hope for something better; a desire to create a new/old, more vital version of humanity.

Chapter Four: Voice of Our Blood: Discourses of National Socialism in Black Metal

Part One: Introduction

National Socialist Black Metal (NSBM) has been enormously influential throughout the international black metal scene since the millennium.[302] While NSBM is in no small part influenced by Varg Vikernes and his transformation into an Asá Trŭ Neo-Nazi after his incarceration, the NSBM movement is far more than the result of black metaler "wanna-bes" mimicking the mighty Count Grishnackh. Black metal defines itself to a large degree through transgression, alienation and provocation, and in western culture, few things are more transgressive, alienating and provocative than Neo-Nazism. National Socialist discourses also speak to notions of place, history, identity and traditional culture that are endemic to black metal of all persuasions.[303] In Chapter Four, I will describe the ways that NSBM utilizes discourses concerning race, nation and culture, and the ways that those discourses are contested by non-racist black metalers.

Neo-Nazism is nothing new to transgressive music-based youth culture; Neo-Nazi punk, or "white noise," has been widely distributed throughout the far-right underground for nearly three decades.[304] Black metal is unique in the world of racist rock in that it has been endowed with a militant, fanatic caché carried over from the Norwegian church- burning days. It is also decidedly anti-Christian, which gives it a hyper-transgressive quality to participants sympathetic to Neo-Nazi ideology, but bored with the rhetoric of Christian Identity and other racist Christian

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[302] Gardell, Mattias. *Gods of the Blood*, Chapter 7. 2003 Duke University Press.
[303] Moynihan, Michael and Soderlind, Didrik. *Lords of Chaos*, pgs 33-43. 2003 Feral House.
[304] Gardell, pgs 69-70.

groups.[305] NSBM is also indelibly linked with Asá Trŭ and opposed to Satanism, which gives it a "blood and soil" attraction to many young Neo-Nazis looking for identity in their distant, ancestral past.

The characterization of NSBM as an offshoot of the larger white racist movement is particularly accurate in describing NSBM in North America and Western Europe, but in the former Soviet block, NSBM has gained a life and momentum independent of the larger white racist movement and has come to dominate the black metal scenes in Poland, Ukraine and Russia.[306] The language used by Eastern European NSBM bands is that of hyper-nationalism, exacerbated by decades of Soviet domination and poverty induced by communism. NSBM bands in Eastern Europe often cultivate mysterious, shadowy images, rarely giving interviews or performing outside of their home countries. In this chapter, I will shed some light on this important but poorly understood corner of the black metal world and contextualize Eastern European NSBM within both the international NSBM scene and black metal in general.

What is perhaps even more significant than why some black metalers accept Neo-Nazi ideology is why most black metalers reject it. Currently, NSBM is a highly contentious subject within black metal.[307] Many black metalers whole-heartedly accept National Socialism,[308] while others vitriolically condemn it, and many others look upon it with vague skepticism and indifference.[309] Black metal brings basic questions of morality, identity and "goodness" into question; why, then, balk at racist and genocidal ideologies? Most black metalers have no problem speaking about their hatred of Christians and Christianity, but many are uncomfortable adding Judaism and discourses of race into this equation. Black metal prides itself on being

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[305] Gardell, Chapter Two.
[306] *Decibel*, May 2006.
[307] Moynihan and Soderlind, pgs 145-159.
[308] Moynihan and Soderlind, pgs 347-356.
[309] Moynihan and Soderlind, pgs 347-349.

hyper-transgressive and iconoclastic, but the majority of black metalers are unwilling to cross the threshold of the radical-right. In this chapter, I will explain how and why this unwillingness occurs.

NSBM is one of the most transgressive, arcane and potentially dangerous representations of music-based youth culture in the world. Even "mainstream" Neo-Nazis often express confusion, disgust and fear when confronted with the bizarre sight of a corpse-painted, orc-like creature vomiting blood in front of a swastika.[310] As we have seen in previous chapters, this radical departure from humanity, modernity and rationality is a major aspect of black metal's appeal. In some cases this is all NSBM is; one more transgressive signifier among many others. For others, notions of ultra-nationalism and militant racism take on deeply meaningful connotations when placed within a black metal context. Black metal, in all of its forms, glorifies the distant past and seeks to annihilate the mundane present. Neo-Nazism makes this assertion very simple by imposing notions of otherness onto virtually everyone unlike oneself and elevating the angry, megalomaniacal back metaler to the status of a God among sheep. Notions of modernity and civilization seem vague and intellectual to many black metalers; race, nation and tradition are less so.[311] NSBM utilizes logic very similar to that of non-racist black metal: the present is sick and degraded; the past was glorious and vital; the present must be destroyed/escaped in order to attain a meaningful existence. The primary difference for NSBM is the polarization of the them/us dichotomy into strictly racial and national categories. This dichotomy, like much of the cultural activity evident in black metal, attempts to reconcile the paradox of individuality and group identity.

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[310] Gardell, pgs 304-307.
[311] Kahn-Harris, Keith. *Extreme Metal: Music and Culture on the Edge*, pg 41. 2007 Berg.

Part Two: Norsk Arisk Black Metal

Like all of black metal culture, NSBM began in the Nordic countries. Many of the early Norwegian bands flirted with Neo-Nazi imagery and ideology, but prior to Varg Vikernes' murder conviction, swastikas and racism were largely provocations; one example of misanthropy among many. Vikernes, prior to his incarceration, was a Devil Worshiper and anti-Nazi, only espousing racist Asá Trŭ once he was behind bars. In the infamous 1993 *Kerrang!* article, Vikernes exclaims: "I support all dictatorships – Stalin, Hitler, Ceaucescu – and I will become the dictator to Scandinavia myself!"[312] During the early days of the scene, misanthropy, not politics, was the order of the day. Euronymous himself was an avowed Stalinist, believing that brutal totalitarian communism was the perfect expression of his misanthropy and the will of Satan.[313] Politics was a method of transgression in the early 90's, one of the less important methods compared to religion, violence and general misanthropy.

Vikernes' "awakening" as a racist Asá Trŭ neo-Nazi after his convictions for murdering Euronymous and burning several churches gave birth to the now flourishing NSBM movement. The very real fact the Burzum is among the most original, atmospheric and respected "bands" in black metal helped legitimize Vikernes' ideology and spread black metal into the world of militant racism. Vikernes describes to Moynihan and Soderlind the origins of his interests in race and National Socialism:

When I was a skinhead, there still weren't any colored people, but there were these punks – that's more why I went over to the other side. There were no skinheads in Bergen. My brother

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[312] *Kerrang!,* March 27 1993.
[313] Moynihan and Soderlind, pg 136.

shaved his head and I cut my hair short. We were into the weapons, German weapons, and these attitudes like *war means to fight, peace means to degenerate*.[314]

There is no reason to think that Vikernes' claim that he was a skinhead when he was young is anything but apocryphal. No other scene members or people who knew Vikernes in his younger days (including his mother) recall anything about Vikernes being a skinhead.[315] Interviews with Vikernes prior to his conviction are rife with the devil worship and exaltation of "evil" and "darkness" popular at the time, but lacking in any specific affiliation with National Socialist ideology.[316] In a very important sense, Vikernes' neo-Nazism had nothing to do with black metal and everything to do with his incarceration.

For several years after his imprisonment, Vikernes decried black metal altogether, adopting a role as a far-right ideologue.[317] He has, however, become a hero and a martyr to the international NSBM movement, a role he has not declined. The combination of Asá Trŭ and racism that Vikernes has espoused has been embraced by a large section of the Asá Trŭ groups in the world, usually identifying themselves as Odinists as opposed to more neutral terms like Asá Trŭ and Heathen.[318] Vikernes explains the relationship between his attacks on Christianity and his Neo-Nazism:

There was a t-shirt that Øystein printed that said 'Kill the Christians!' I think that is ridiculous. What's the logic in that? Why should we kill our brothers? They're just temporarily asleep, entranced. We have to say, 'Hey, wake up!' That's what we have to do, wake them up from the Jewish trance. We don't have to kill them because that would be killing ourselves, because they are part of us.[319]

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[314] Moynihan and Soderlind, pgs 160-161.
[315] Moynihan and Soderlind, Chapters 7 and 8.
[316] *Kerrang!,* March 27 1993. Moynihan and Soderlind, Chapters 5 and 6.
[317] Moynihan and Soderlind , pgs 170-173.
[318] Gardell, Chapter Four.
[319] *Moynihan and Soderlind*, pg 163.

Here we see a radical departure from the earlier rhetoric of Norwegian black metal: Vikernes asserts that Christians are the victims of an anti-human Other, and they must be "awakened" and mobilized. This is a significant shift away from the generalized misanthropy and denial of humanity, "goodness," and progress that characterized the ranting of Euronymous and the early declarations of Vikernes himself. In a very real sense, these kinds of statements mark the end of Vikernes' career as a black metal ideologue, and the beginning of his career as a neo-Nazi ideologue whose rhetoric is not very divergent from hundreds of far-right ideologues all over the world.

Although various Norwegian scene members flirted with neo-Nazi imagery prior to Vikernes' conversion in prison, the Norwegian scene was relatively apolitical during the early 90's. Ihsahn and Samoth from Emperor explain their feelings regarding racism and far-right politics in an interview with *Terrorizer*:

> Samoth: "Well that's something Vikernes started."
>
> Ihsahn: "As I have said before, I feel Black Metal should have nothing to do with politics. It's not a political thing, it's something more spiritual. I realize that many people think that fascism, Satanism and black metal are one and the same, probably because they are all extreme ideologies."
>
> *Terrorizer*: Plus it's not such a great leap from the strong over the weak philosophy, which is an integral part of Satanism, to fascism.
>
> Samoth: "That's something I can identify with, but that doesn't mean I wear a swastika and worship Adolf Hitler or whatever."
>
> Ihsahn: "If we look down on anything, then it is humanity as a whole. It's rather naïve to think that your intelligence is based on the colour of your skin. Of course, there are cultures which are hard to understand for people in different countries, but I think that's positive as well. Like in the States, everything gets mixed together. They have no old culture at all. I think it's important to keep different cultures as they are, because so many cultures have been lost because of the Christian religion. Like you have Christian missions going into the jungle and forcing their religion upon tribes that have been living on a very primitive basis for thousands of years. What do they need Christianity for?"[320]

[320] *Terrorizer*, 1997.

This quote reiterates black metal's reverence for the "primitive." For Ihsahn, and many other black metalers, their hatred for modernity trumps the transgressive qualities of National Socialism. In this interview, Emperor reference pre-industrial cultures as being closer to the "golden age" that they aspire to than the mediocrity and cultural pluralism of the United States. The racism inherent in National Socialism excludes those peoples who remain untouched by Christianity and is therefore contraindicated for the black metal worldview.

However, the picture is far less clear than being simply pro or anti Nazi/racist. Samoth himself was once shown posing for a promotional photo in front of a swastika flag in corpse-paint and battle garb.[321] Mortiis, original bassist and lyricist for Emperor, explains in Bill Zebub's film *Black Metal: a Documentary*: "I'll admit I had a dumb period for about a year when I thought I was a fucking Nazi. And then I finally woke up and I was like: what the fuck am I thinking about?"[322] Mortiis' explanation seems to be fairly common amongst the original black metal scene: a brief flirtation with Neo-Nazism, followed by disillusionment. With the exception of Burzum, there are no major NSBM bands from Norway playing a meaningful role in the scene.

The case of Darkthrone and their relationship to National Socialism and racist ideology is illuminating in its confusion, ambiguity and mixed messages. The album art on the back of Darkthrone's *Transilvanian*(sic) *Hunger* LP bore the phrase *Norsk Arisk Black Metal* "Nordic Aryan Black Metal."[323] A press release that the band originally wanted to include in the album's inner-sleeve stated: "We would like to state that *Transilvanian Hunger* stands beyond any criticism. If any man should attempt to criticize this LP, he should be thoroughly patronized for

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[321] Baddeley, pg 195.
[322] Zebub, Bill. *Black Metal: A Documentary*.
[323] Moynihan and Soderlind, pg 353.

his obviously Jewish behavior."[324] The anti-Semitism of the statement is not unusual, but the band's reaction to the resulting controversy was rather bizarre.

The band's label, *Peaceville*, refused to promote the album due to Darkthrone's anti-Semitic statements, causing Darkthrone to immediately go on the defensive, claiming the entire affair was a misunderstanding. Darkthrone's subsequent press statement/apology reads:

> Darkthrone can only apologize for this tragic use of words. But please let us explain this. You see, in Norway, the word "Jew" is used all the time to mean something out of order, if something breaks down, or if something is stupid etc. It's always been like this, we don't know why. It's just a coincidence in our slang language. Why is impossible to say because Norwegians have always liked Jews and racism is not a big issue in Norway. Believe us, we were as shocked as everyone else when everyone suddenly called us a Nazi band. It's so unfair, and we want to stop this A.S.A.P.[325]

It is difficult to assess how much of this we are expected to believe. Due to their long-time friendship with Varg Vikernes, it is not surprising that Darkthrone should have inherited some of his political ideology. Their remarkable about-face and subsequent blitzkrieg of improbable explanations is very surprising and instructive; racism and Neo-Nazism are clearly not important enough to the members of Darkthrone to jeopardize their record's distribution. A dedicated NSBM band would have scoffed at the idea of a retraction, and Darkthrone's decision to offer one illustrates their ambivalence towards National Socialism and racism, an ambivalence that is characteristic of the Norwegian scene in general.

The hard-line Satanism and individualism of the Norwegian scene is often in conflict with National Socialist ideology. King from Gorgoroth asserts:

> NSBM as a movement is more or less made up. It's only kids using words to spread some kind of fear to be shocking in a way. Nazism to me is a flock ideology. Black metal, or at least Gorgoroth, is about the individual and creating your own moral out of chaos, and be your own God more or less.[326]

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[324] Moynihan and Soderlind, pg 350.
[325] Moynihan and Soderlind, pg 351.
[326] *Black Metal: A Documentary*.

King's contention that Satanism and National Socialism are ideologically incompatible is repeatedly echoed by anti-Nazi Satanists, most prominently and effectively Gavin Baddeley.[327] Satanic black metalers place a great deal of emphasis on individualism and self-creation, aspects that National Socialism is awkwardly adapted to. The attempt to adapt neo-Nazi ideology to an arch-individualist credo is yet another attempt to reconcile the contradiction between the self and the group that runs throughout black metal culture. It is far less successful in doing so than other methods, and NSBM tends to place less emphasis on individualism than do other types of black metal.

The Norwegian scene is not one of the primary hubs of activity for NSBM. North America and Eastern Europe are far more influential and prolific in defining NSBM as a subgenre. The Norwegian scene is generally ambivalent and fractured regarding questions of race and politics. Burzum are the notable exception to the rule from the NS perspective, and Enslaved are one of the more outspoken anti-racist bands in Norway. Most bands like Emperor, Darkthrone and Satyricon have flirted with neo-Nazi imagery and ideology, but refrain from taking a strong stance one way or the other. As we will see, NSBM as a defined, unique subgenre emerged outside of Norway.

Part Three: USNSBM

North America, and the United States in particular, has become one of the most prolific producers of NSBM in the last eight years. This is partially due to the longstanding racist underground and existent infrastructure to produce and distribute racist and neo-Nazi material, as well as freedom of speech laws that don't exist in countries like Germany. Resistance Records

[327] Baddeley. Section Three, Chapter One.

has been particularly important in promoting "white noise"[328] music and has recently begun to sign and distribute NSBM bands. NSBM is a contentious issue within the militant racist counter-culture, as black metal in all of its forms is fairly anti-Christian and continues to carry connotations of Satanism with it, although very few NSBM bands identify with Satanism. NSBM in the United States, more so than in other parts if the world, works in conjunction with the larger National Socialist and militant racist counter-culture, garnering little respect or audience outside of that circle as a result.

The United States also has a long history of organized racism and religious cult activity, both of which are combined into the establishment of a racist Asá Trŭ movement based around NSBM. Mattias Gardell describes the establishment in North America of racist Asá Trŭ, or Odinism is it is usually called in the U.S., in great detail in his book *Gods of the Blood*. Jeffrey Kaplan writes in his book *Radical Religion in America*:

> Odinism, in its most extreme racialist form, is quite compatible with many sectors of the right wing constellation, as its attractiveness to the late Robert Mathews and to other members of the revolutionary Order as well as to certain skinhead groups demonstrates. The strongly millenarian and chiliastic overtones of the apocalyptic 'twilight of the gods,' Ragnarök, and its aftermath provide a bridge to the potential racialist adherent, connecting those from fundamentalist and evangelical Christian backgrounds to Odinism.[329]

As we have seen, the notion of a coming apocalypse or socio-cultural upheaval is a central part of the black metal worldview. This is particularly true for NSBM in North America, where the notion of Racial Holy War (RaHoWa) is particularly potent and is believed to be imminent.[330] National Socialism and militant racism provides a very simple explanation for whom "the enemy" is and connects participants to their ancestral past through explanations of "the blood" and "the race."

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[328] A type of neo-Nazi punk
[329] Kaplan, Jeffrey. *Radical Religion In America: Millenarian Movements from the Far Right to the Children of Noah,* pg 69.. 1997 Syracuse University Press.
[330] Gardell, pgs 85-86.

Vinland Winds records is an independent label dedicated primarily to NSBM and was run by Richard P. Mills, a.k.a. Grimnir Wotansvolk, a.k.a. G. Heretik, front-man for NSBM stalwarts Grand Belial's Key until his mysterious death in 2006.[331] In a 2005 interview with the zine *Nihilistic*, Mills pontificates about his lyrical motivations:

> The lyrics deal with religious topics that go deeper than the early days of Christianity. The true roots of this pestilence are explored, exploring pre-Christian Judaism and its gross culture. Disgust in others and pride in ourselves inspire us to express our bigotry through music. I think that our latest release, and songs like *Vultures Of Misfortune*, paint a great picture of the horrific ways of ancient Jewish culture and their customs. I am offended by the poor quality of music that my peers are recording. Musically, I hope to bring something unique to the table. All our lyrics express an enmity for Juden-Christianity, and endless sadistic cynicism which mocks and ridicules the religion with a twisted sense of sarcasm.[332]

We see in this quotation a common tactic among NSBM ideologues, particularly in the U.S.: the extension of hostility towards Christianity to hostility towards Judaism. NSBM bands attempt to make their anti-Semitism more palatable to people outside of the scene by equating anti-Semitism with anti-Christian sentiments that are far more accepted within extreme metal. NSBM tries to achieve a cultural bait-and-switch; equating enmity towards a powerful majority, with enmity towards an oppressed minority.

Unfortunately, antiracist watchdog groups like the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), while taking notice of NSBM, have failed to research, understand or represent NSBM with any degree of accuracy. It is difficult to say to what extent the SPLC's report on NSBM *Sounds of Violence* is a product of poor research or deliberate misrepresentation, but the resulting report varies between overly simplistic and apocryphal. *Sounds of Violence* asserts that "Vikernes is in prison there for beheading his best friend. He endorses fascism, child sacrifice and torture." The reason given for Vikernes' incarceration is factually untrue, as is the reference to child sacrifice. Vikernes did make statements condoning torture during his teenage devil worshipping phase, but

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[331] Vinlandwinds.com.
[332] *Nihilistic*, 2005.

has since disavowed such sentiments in his capacity as a neo-Nazi. *Sounds of Violence* goes on to describe in titillating detail how "today's new generation of metal bands, known as the black metal underground, is so extreme it makes Marilyn Manson look square. For those who want to turn teenage angst into hatred, this metal scene is a natural target." Here, *Sounds of Violence* begins to contextualize itself within the long-standing tradition of parent-directed scare tactics in the vein of Carl A. Raschke's fanciful 1990 scree *Paint It Black*, which asserts that heavy metal is but one part of a wide ranging Satanic conspiracy. Texts of this kind replace comprehensive understanding and a sober assessment of evidence and context with hysteria, baseless assertion and witch-hunting.

One of the most glaring misrepresentations evident in *Sounds of Violence* is the assertion that all Satanic or neo-Nazi affiliated bands can be branded as black metal. *Sounds of Violence* claims that the industrial bands Electric Hellfire Club and Blood Axis are both black metal bands, an assertion that is unambiguously false. The report goes on to describe a band called NON as being "often referred to as the vanguard of the American black metal scene." As far as I can ascertain no such band even exists, and they are certainly not a major, or even visible, player in the NSBM scene. Perhaps the most irresponsible misrepresentation in the SPLC report claims: "Among others, Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris -- who murdered 12 of their classmates and a teacher at Columbine High School in Colorado last April -- were said to have been influenced by this kind of music."[333] There is no evidence whatsoever to suggest that the Columbine tragedy was even tenuously associated with black metal, and the SPLC's suggestion that there was such a connection is egregiously irresponsible. Regardless of the inventive fantasies of people like Raschke, Lunsford, Massa and Ward, NSBM is a very real, growing

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[333] Ward, Eric K. Lunsford, John. Massa, Justin. *Sounds of Violence*.

movement in North America today. The SPLC is quite right to be keeping an eye on NSBM; it does have a fairly high potential for violence. In deliberately misrepresenting facts, ignoring context and falsifying information, the SPLC damages their own credibility and the worthwhile cause that they claim to represent.

Keith Kahn-Harris provides a fairly accurate, if not altogether in-depth, assessment of neo-Nazism and militant racism in extreme metal. Transgression, as well as the widespread interest in nature and ancestral culture evident in black metal, are Kahn-Harris' primary explanation for the presence of far-right sentiments in extreme metal. Kahn-Harris writes:

> An interest in Pagan mythology can easily become an interest in racism and fascism. The apparently uncritical celebration of Pagan pasts, the obsession with the 'unpolluted' countryside and the distrust of the cosmopolitan city were common features in nineteenth and twentieth century fascist movements. Indeed, Nazism contained a strong anti-Christian, mystical strain…In many ways Nazis are *the* preeminent transgressive symbol in the modern world.[334]

While Khan-Harris' connection between the Nazi interest in nature, mysticism and ancient culture and black metal's interest in those subjects is astute, his failure to differentiate in any substantive way between the international death metal scene and the international black metal scene causes many of his arguments to lose their luster. There is no cohesive NS death metal scene, nor is there much interest within death metal regarding nature or one's ancestral past. These subjects are, as Khan-Harris suggests, connected in black metal, but they are *not* in death metal.

Resistance Records, the most prominent white power record label in North America, was purchased in 1999 by William Pierce, head of the National Alliance, one of the largest militant racist groups in the U.S.[335] *Resistance* subsequently acquired the independent label *Unholy*

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[334] *Kahn-Harris*, pg 41.
[335] Gardell, pg 135.

which is dedicated almost exclusively to NSBM.[336] The *Resistance Records* affiliated NSBM band Grom has become one of the most outspoken proponents of NSBM and racist Asá Tru in the U.S. Grom guitarist and *Resistance Records* employee[337] Yimir G. Winter explains NSBM's contribution to black metal:

> In years past going through the 90's especially, I think that a lot of people would agree that a lot of the music had started to become politically correct. The music that was once violent and offensive that dealt with darkness and brutal concepts was becoming almost like hippy music. You could offend one thing, but you couldn't say this about another thing. You have most bands following the formula of anti-Christ, kill the Christians…well, what about the Jews? On a religious level Christianity is based in Judaism and on a different level, which NSBM takes it to, Jews are a race. I think that they are responsible for most of the wrongs in the world. Black metal shouldn't be about peace and love and be careful who you offend. The essential reason is that during World War Two, the Germans took various symbols associated with Nordic paganism, the futhark runes, and different Viking symbols.[338]

Again, we see the equation of anti-Christian sentiments and anti-Semitism. Yimir also makes the connection between back metal's interest in mysticism/heathenism and the Nazi interest in similar subjects. To Yimir, anything short of foaming-at-the-mouth neo-Nazism is "hippy music." The association of nature worship, reverence for the ancient past and an interest in Norse paganism with neo-Nazism is not a huge intellectual leap. Combining this somewhat understandable connection with the powerfully transgressive semiotic properties of Nazi imagery, NSBM provides angry, disaffected, alienated young people with an intoxicatingly evocative and provocative identity that is guaranteed to enrage parents and alienate the vast majority of mainstream culture.

In researching this section, I was given the opportunity to interview Erich Gliebe, head of *Resistance Records*, high ranking member of the National Alliance and the man largely responsible for the popularity of NSBM in North America. Gliebe explained the steady rise of

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[336] *Decibel*, May 2006.
[337] *Decibel*, May 2006.
[338] *Black Metal: A Documentary.*

NSBM in North America since the late 90's and its ability to create inroads into groups of young people that other types of racist music have been unable to reach. Part of NSBM's popularity, Gliebe explained, was due to its pro-Pagan and anti-Satanic attitude:

> We have no part in that Satanic stuff, that's exactly what we are against. We are totally against that Satanic nonsense. There are many people in the NSBM scene that would like to see the whole scene cleaned out of all the Satanic stuff…We consider Satanism to be a Jewish creation. The people, of course, in the NSBM scene don't believe in the bible, we basically see it as Hebrew mythology. So that is where the figure of Satan comes from, and when somebody is talking about Satan, we consider it to be just a character in the bible.[339]

NSBM, particularly in North America, tends to characterize Christianity as being some type of sinister Jewish trick to subvert the minds of Euro-Americans. Gliebe is emphatic in his insistence that NSBM has no connection with Satanism and draws its strength from the culture and heritage of pre-Christian Europe. NSBM takes its cultural paradigms straight from the apolitical Norwegian scene, but modifies them slightly to fit a racist/neo-Nazi political agenda.

Some of Gliebe's most fascinating insights were in reference to NSBM's approach to the group/individual paradox that is so central to black metal culture. Gliebe explained to me the NSBM fan's tendency towards isolation:

> I have noticed with a lot of NSBM types, a lot of them don't associate in cliques. They do their own thing. I would say they are more creative and more spiritual than someone into your more typical pro-white music…A lot of white kids, they don't want to be told what to do. They don't want to get their hair cut. I don't think that a lot of the NSBM people out there are really into any kind of clique, they may have friends on the internet and they might go to concerts, but there are not big groups of them like there are big groups of skinheads.[340]

Gliebe attempts to characterize NSBM fans as more intellectual and less gang-like; if skinheads are the new storm-troopers, then NSBMers are the new intellectual elite, propagandists, ideologues and mystics. Gliebe articulates the tendency within North American black metal to reject group identities in the traditional subcultural sense in favor of virtual groups

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[339] 1-11-08.
[340] 2-11-08.

and temporary groups like those found at concerts. Black metal constantly negotiates the paradox between singular and group identities, but rarely with any long-term success.

Gliebe would have us believe that notions of race allow black metalers to identify with their "true identity" while also maintaining individual autonomy:

> I don't see BM as being part of some anarchist scene where everyone just does their own thing. I think it binds people together. In a way they do want to get away from the herd mentality, it's true because they tend to not belong to any organization. They don't have patches on their jackets that say "such and such a place black metal," like skinheads do.[341] A lots of black metalers, whether they admit it or not are part of a larger group: the race. Black metalers would freak out if one day they went to a concert and half the audience was black and had dreadlocks.[342]

Gliebe attempts to impose a specific, unavoidable notion of group on black metal; that of race. The fact that black metal is wildly popular in Latin America and other "non-white" regions of the world, and that non-racist black metalers tour in those regions with the greatest enthusiasm, seems to have escaped Gliebe.[343] When I read to Gliebe the quote from King denouncing NSBM, quoted earlier in this chapter,[344] Gliebe responded:

> King might say those things, but I think he has a racial consciousness whether he admits it or not, and that he would prefer to live in a white neighborhood. We do have room for individualism. We encourage people to pursue their own interest and their own occupations and hobbies without causing any detriment to the race.[345]

It is very unlikely that King's hyper-individualism would sit well with Gliebe or any other NSBMer; it's certain that King's Satanism would not. NSBM attempts to unite black metalers under the banner of race. For the vast majority of black metalers, in the U.S. as well as elsewhere, the homogenizing effects inherent in National Socialism and its de-emphasis of individuality and free-will are simply incompatible with black metal culture.

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[341] This is patently false; many European black metalers do exactly that.
[342] 2-11-08.
[343] Kahn-Harris, pgs 70-71.
[344] See page 9.
[345] 2-11-08.

Far-right propaganda aside, the majority of U.S. black metalers have no interest in National Socialism or racist ideology. As we have seen in the Norwegian scene, most U.S. black metalers approach NSBM ideology with ambivalence and a certain degree if skepticism, but rarely open condemnation. Xasther, a one man black metal band from California, explains his feelings on the subject of NSBM:

> I don't mind it, they have their reasons for their beliefs, who's really to say who are the real one's behind it and who isn't? I am not in any way affiliated with National Socialism, yet in layman's terms I see it, or they may see it as a fist in the face of a liberal society. When humans are given too much freedom, they often abuse it, being free to overpopulate and let everything go to shit. But then again, if National Socialism came into power, into effect in their own countries, I think there would end up being a lot of details to it that they wouldn't like about it. I would say I'm a fan of some of these bands like Gontyna Kry, Veles, Kataxu etc... as they play some dark, grim and hateful black metal.[346]

Xasthur's comments are fairly typical of most black metalers' feelings towards neo-Nazism; distrust mixed with a hesitancy to condemn an ideology with such intense transgressive cache. While unwilling to overtly reject an ideology that instills fear and outrage in all corners of mainstream culture, an ideology that is often proffered as the definition of evil, the majority of black metalers understand that National Socialism is anathema to their project and that they would be the first against the wall if neo-Nazis ever got their way.

Wolves in the Throne Room (WITTR) are one of the U.S. black metal bands who vigorously oppose racism and neo-Nazism. With their links to the crust punk scene and the ecological movement, WITTR are a likely candidate as the poster boys for anti-racist U.S. black metal. In a statement on their Myspace page, WITTR assert their opposition to NSBM:

> In scores of interviews we have expressed our deep philosophical and spiritual opposition to racism, anti-Semitism, authoritarianism and the glorification of war. We have specifically condemned National Socialism and the bands who explicitly or implicitly endorse these simple-minded and weak ideas.[347]

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[346] *Maelstrom*, Issue 11.
[347] Myspace.com, 2-7-08.

In black metal terminology, "simple-minded," and "weak" are two of the most condemnatory adjectives at their disposal.[348] Anti-racist black metalers attack NSBMers for following a collective, herd mentality and denying the pure, pre-Christian character of pre-industrial "non-white" people. NSBMers accuse anti-racist black metalers of denying the call of their blood and ancestry. The disagreement comes back to the conflict between those who emphasize a resonant ancestral culture, accessible through the blood and psychological archetypes, and those who emphasize individualism, self-creation and the rejection of modernity, regardless of its political manifestation.

NSBM in the United States has a lot going for it; relatively free speech, entrenched racism and large, well funded groups like the National Alliance to give them support, financially and otherwise. The majority of black metal enthusiasts in the United States offer NSBM little beyond sarcasm, as the May 2006 feature on NSBM in *Decibel* illustrates:

> As if acting out some bizarre atavistic saga—half comedy, half high drama—our protagonists assume their marks in the theatre of the absurd. Somewhere not-so-deep in the sub-underground, the forces of National Socialist Black Metal—henceforth known as NSBM—are circling their Panzer tanks (or at very least their amplifiers) against the evil forces of Jewry, Niggerdom and Fagitude. No, wait—the NSBM dudes are the evil ones (Evil is, after all, a requirement of all black metal) and they're aligning themselves against the Zionist Occupation Government, jungle fever and same-sex marriage. Or is it Israel, multiculturalism and gay bars? Point is, if it ain't white—and straight, and pagan—it ain't right.[349]

As the thinly veiled mockery of the *Decibel* article illustrates, NSBM is not likely to gain much political support outside of its already established base of skinheads and neo-Nazis. For American black metalers, racism has only a limited transgressive value.

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[348] Moynihan and Soderlind, Chapter 3.
[349] *Decibel*, May 2006.

Part Four: Ukrainian Insurgent Army

Eastern Europe has one of the most vibrant, fanatic and racist black metal scenes in the world.[350] Poland has a fairly rich tradition of extreme metal, with bands like Vader and Behemoth gaining international popularity since the early 90's, as well as a flourishing racist and far-right movement.[351] Russia and Ukraine have seen an explosion of fascist, racist and ultra-nationalist activity since the fall of the Soviet Union, with metal, and more recently black metal, playing an important role in the now thriving far-right movement.[352] Black metal in Eastern Europe has taken on a fanatic, genocidal tone that is reminiscent of the bombastic proclamations of the early Norwegian scene, but with decidedly neo-Nazi overtones. The political chaos, poverty, corruption, organized crime and heterogeneous character of the former Soviet Union has created a volatile and fanatic NSBM underground across Eastern Europe.[353]

With the exception of Burzum, Poland's Graveland are perhaps the most revered NSBM band in the world. Regarding his band's origins, Graveland's only permanent member Darken explains to *Pitt* magazine:

> Graveland was born at the beginning. Time did not exist then; there was only darkness. Graveland was born from hate dreaming in our lands. We take revenge for our dying ancestors who protected our pagan lands from our foes who wanted to destroy the harmony of nature. Christianity brought false goodness… Graveland knew this. Our souls burn with fire of hate and retribution! Aryan race wake up! The new era of paganism and darkness is coming. Graveland will show you the way. Start the holocaust again, kill Jews and Christians. Destroy the false god of Jesus Christ! I, Darken, the Black Druid of Darkness, Karcharoth of Infernum and Capricornus are the spirits of war. We come from the land of everlasting funerals; from the unholy winter. We are three angels of retribution. War![354]

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[350] Moynihan and Soderlind, pgs 321-326.
[351] Hockenos, Paul. *Free to Hate: the Rise of the Right in Post Communist Eastern Europe*, pgs 193-296. 1996 Routledge.
[352] Shenfield, Stephen. D. Russian Fascism: Traditions, Tendencies, Movements, Chapter Three. 2001 M.E. Sharp Inc.
[353] Hockenos, Chapter Four. Shenfield, Chapter Four.
[354] *Pit*, issue No. 15.

Rhetoric of this type is rare among NSBM in North America. Graveland asserts that it is a spiritual entity; some type of mystical force outside of time. Darken's statements are genocidal, apocalyptic and very much in reference to the early Norwegian scene's interest in "darkness" and "evil." Although Darken is an outspoken Pagan, his rhetoric is clearly inspired by Satanic Nordic black metalers like Euronymous and It. Graveland's pontifications are partially designed to establish subcultural capital; in the 90's black metal, particularly outside of Norway, had to be as uncompromising as possible to be taken seriously. However, shock and transgression are not the only reason for this type of extreme oratory. As we have seen, black metal combines hyper-transgression with mystical religious ideas that offer participants a method for transcending the mundane, escaping modernity and the creation of highly empowering identities. In the former Soviet block, modernity has taken a particularly grim and unappealing form, causing eastern European black metalers to be particularly keen to escape it.

Notions of apocalypse and an impending racial holy war are central to Graveland's interests and ambitions. Darken explains in the *Pitt* interview:

> We have much time for activity to continue the work started in Norway. Churches burn. In Poland, new neo-fascism powers are rising. Its theories are near to our ideology, so we support it. War is the first duty of all who live for Darkness or Paganism.[355] In Europe, neo-fascism is re-born and Europe must re-emerge in a new spirit. It will lead to big changes in the future. We have to take power from old, true traditions of these lands. We chose the way of war, because we have to wage war against the sub-human races from Turkey, Africa and Rumania. Destroy Negroes and other sub-men! They destroy our traditions and culture. Europe must be cleansed from this fucking shit! Europe only for white Aryan race![356]

Darken suggests an apocalyptic genocide to cleanse Europe of its "impure" elements, with NSBMers as the vanguard. NSBMers in North America have closer contact with organizations like the National Front, who have had decades of experience retooling their message in order to sound more palatable to potentially sympathetic people who would be very

[355] Capitalizations in the original interview.
[356] *Pit*, issue No. 15.

alienated by statements like Darken's, so statements of this kind are rare among NSBMers in North America. In eastern Europe, Darken's call to arms and genocide is echoed by numerous angry young Slavs across the former Soviet block who are looking for any means of empowerment, meaning and identity that they can find.

Ukraine has produced some of the most internationally respected black metal of the new millennium, and almost all of it is NSBM. The Ukrainian scene is close-knit, incestuous in terms of band make-up, and fanatic. The Ukrainian NSBM band Hate Forest's website proclaims:

> Hate Forest's first songs were created in the year 1995 in the Ukraine. Hate Forest's art is based upon the Aryan/Slavonic mythology, Nietzschean philosophy, and the ideology of elitism. Now Hate Forest includes four persons. Every subhuman buying Hate Forest releases buys a weapon against himself.[357]

Ukrainian NSBMers are fond of terms like "subhuman," which are often spurned by "pro-white" activists in the west who seek mainstream legitimacy. Hate Forest is famously secretive, the quote above being one of the few press statements available in English, which adds to their "aura" and subcultural capital in the international black metal scene. Hate Forest incorporates Ukrainian folk music and traditional vocals into their music in a highly effective way, a tactic which adds both to their nationalist credentials at home and their exotic appeal abroad. NSBM attempts to create a sense that European cultures all over the world are "waking-up" and realizing their national/racial identity. Ukrainian NSBM asserts a distinct nationalist, Pagan, racist perspective that is specific to a place and a culture, while suggesting that other European traditions could be applied to the same framework by NSBMers in their respective cultures.

Nocturnal Mortem are a Ukrainian NSBM band that shares members with Hate Forest but are far more prolific, publicized and wildly distributed. Nocturnal Mortem emphasize

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[357] http://www.supernalmusic.com/labels/supernal/hate_forest.htm.

nationalism, racism and organized political action in interviews, as this exchange with a Slovenian NSBM interviewer illustrates:

> (NM) In the past we burned down churches. Nowadays we're more into political movements against subpeople. What is your opinion about that?
> (Interviewer) *I understand and I support that kind of movements. We have some blacks, Asians and mostly Muslims in Slovenia. I don't know how they are able to live with such incredibly stupid, sick mentality.*
> (NM) Now, this is the reason why a lot of labels don't want to support us and it's one of the reasons why *The End Records* broke the contract. We had some problems with *Nuclear Blast*... but that won't stop us.
> (I) *What about the concerts and clubs in Ukraine?*
> (NM) We'll have a festival on winter solstice (23rd December). There will be only pagans and people who support our ideas visiting it. There will be no Satanists at this festival.
> (I) *How would you describe Ukrainian audience on the concerts?*
> (NM) I've been to a lot of concerts and I can say that skinheads and metalheads who are into black metal stick together in all Slavic countries.[358]

Pan-Slavic nationalism, racism and political activism are emphasized here, and in most Ukrainian NSBM statements, over solidarity among metal heads. In this passage, Nocturnal Mortem assert solidarity with skinheads and reject non-racist record labels like *The End* and *Nuclear Blast* as antagonists. As with many hard-line black metalers, regardless of ideological stripe, ideology comes first and the music comes second.

Eastern European NSBM, like most NSBM internationally, is almost universally Pagan and anti-Satanic, and emphasizes the nationalist character of indigenous religions. In an interview with the *Highwire Daze* zine, when asked their opinion on Satanism, Nocturnal Mortem replied, "It does not mean anything to us. It never did. We despise this and especially the school of LaVey as it has nothing to do with our culture's ancient religion."[359] NSBM, above all else, is concerned with the resurrection of an ancient, pre-Christian past. Notions of "the people" and "the nation" are always at the forefront, eclipsing all other concerns. However

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[358] *Firegoat*, 1-11-2001.
[359] *Highwire Daze*, 2002.

transgressive Satanism might be is irrelevant to NSBMers, as their principal concern is the creation of a "racial identity" and connecting with an ancestral past. This type of nostalgia is common in virtually all types of black metal, but in NSBM, and eastern European NSBM in particular, this nostalgia takes on a particularly hostile form, accusing anyone who does not belong to "the people" of responsibility for the perceived cultural decline.

The organized racist movement in the west is very keen to capitalize on the intensity, fanaticism and quality of eastern European NSBM. Erich Gliebe explained to me during our interview:

> We have pretty good communication with bands from Eastern Europe. Poland, Russia, Ukraine. We have put out over here CDs or albums from Graveland, of course, Noktural Mortem, Aryan Terrorism, and we carry a lot of NSBM and Pagan type music from Russia… These Europeans don't have the finances to travel around the world the way that western Europeans do. So they are a bit limited, perhaps they come from a harsher environment and they are more concerned with things on a local level.[360]

Organizations like Gliebe's *National Alliance* are opposed to Judaism, Christianity, and Satanism. Bands from obscure cultures and traditions espousing their pre-Christian national/cultural identity lend themselves effectively to their worldview. Eastern European NSBM provides a very specific model for identity creation, a model that can be adapted to any Euro-centric culture in the world.

Part Five: Conclusion

Karl Beckwith's article "Black Metal is for White People" attempts to address discourses of whiteness, racism and neo-Nazism in black metal.[361] In his article, Beckwith describes the

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[360] 8-02-08.

[361] Beckwith, Karl. *Black Metal is for White People: Constructs of Color and Identity Within the Extreme Metal Scene.* M/C Journal, Volume 5, Issue No. 3, July 2002.

ways in which black metal's nostalgia for an imagined ancient past parallels the nostalgia of the Nazis, and black metal's reverence for nature overlaps with notions of racial purity and "the fatherland." These notions are evident throughout black metal, Beckwith argues, including among those practitioners who are not openly sympathetic to neo-Nazi or racist ideology.[362] These observations are quite accurate, particularly Beckwith's suggestion that notions of nation, purity and ancestral blood are echoed in both racist and anti-racist black metal. However, Beckwith's argument is puzzling on several other accounts, particularly his assertion that black metalers are primarily interested in "whiteness," this idea being exemplified in black and white corpse paint. Black metal's almost obsessive fixation with notions of "darkness" or "blackness" problematizes Beckwith's argument; the name Burzum itself means excessive darkness. To further problematize Beckwith's argument, black metal corpse paint is balanced with white *and* black face paint, the latter often taking dominance. In addition the word Satanism is used once in Beckwith's article, and it is not contextualized within his discussion of race. Paganism or Asá Trŭ are never mentioned by Beckwith, which is a rather glaring omission to any discussion of race in black metal. While many of his insights are well founded, Beckwith either does not address or misunderstands many of the most vital questions regarding his subject.

To characterize black metal as a necessarily racist or fascistic culture is to drastically oversimplify the ambiguous, often contradictory nature of racist and nationalistic discourses within black metal. It can not be ignored, however, that black metal is produced largely by Europeans. Black metal's fan base and more recent incarnations outside of Europe are far less heterogeneous however. Black metal's popularity in Latin America is steadily growing, and Asia, particularly Japan, embraced black metal from very early on.[363] During my own time

[362] Beckwith, Section 3.
[363] Kahn-Harris, pgs 70-71.

living in China, black metal was a conspicuous presence in record shops of any moderate size and on the t-shirts of young Chinese metalheads, particularly in the larger cities. However, as Khan-Harris reminds us, "Those of black African descent are almost totally absent from the scene, whether in the black diaspora, the Caribbean or sub-Saharan Africa."[364] While black metal is gaining popularity throughout the world and is being embraced by numerous cultures and "races" all over the world, discourses regarding race, politics and nationalism remain problematic and contentious.

NSBM is one extreme polarization of this discourse; it asserts that black metal is, in fact, for white people, and more specifically white Pagan neo-Nazis. This interpretation of black metal culture is hotly contested within black metal; it is rare that any interview with any black metaler occurs without the specter of racism and/or neo-Nazism rising its shaven, belligerent head. Many of the most famous and influential Asá Trŭ bands have contested racist discourses most vigorously, seeing it as a misappropriation of their ancestral culture and religion. Swedish black/death metal band Amon Amarth assert:

> Racists have been abusing our ancestors' history for ages. Here in Sweden we've had a bunch of Skinhead-bands using the Viking history and symbols for their own political agendas. Though not as common today, they were pretty popular about ten years ago. We've never been a political band, and personally I can't understand the connection made between Vikings and racism. If anything, Vikings were very open minded to other cultures and people. They traded with people from Africa, the Middle East and even the Chinese, so historically I fail to see the connection.[365]

Amon Amarth's observation regarding the "racial" attitudes of Medieval Nordic peoples is quite true and difficult to argue with; Asá Trŭ NSBM does not address this problem.[366]

Enslaved, the most famous proponents of Asá Trŭ black metal, explain their attitudes towards racist Asá Tru:

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[364] Kahn-Harris, pg 71.
[365] Uttertrash.net
[366] Wilson, Part Three.

I think it contradicts itself. I think the whole idea of Paganism is beyond segregation. That would be like using religion to decide which kind of music is best….Of course you will find all kinds of intolerant people in any political or religious groups. Just because there are racists within the Pagan movement, it doesn't make the movement is racist.[367]

A glorification of the Viking age and pre-Christian Nordic culture does not lend itself particularly well to xenophobic and racist ideologies. This, and many other vital aspects of black metal culture, are either ignored or dismissed by NSBMers, creating an ever-widening rift between NSBM and the rest of black metal culture.

Satanic black metalers have widely condemned NSBM, and vice-versa. Although neo-Nazi strains of Satanism gained a fair amount of popularity during the 1980's, Satanic black metal has largely dismissed these trends, particularly in the post-church burning era.[368] Satanic French black metalers Arkhon Infaustus assert:

Racism and politics are so far away from our vision of black metal. Politics is nothing but the science of man to rule over other men. And to be interested in all of that just means that you are someone locked to these natural and social society…and we are really different from that. We respect this kind of racism, like all these kinds of racism in the world because they breed war…they breed hate…they breed killing…they breed rape and all of that kind of thing. So, we can kind of understand this, but they are too low life of hate to be performed by any of ours. Your spirit is much more important than the country where you were born.[369]

As this quote illustrates, Satanic black metalers' rejection of racism and neo-Nazism has nothing to do with notions of a "universal humanity" or a rejection of hate. Arkhon Infaustus dismiss racism because its hatred is too specific and exclusive. Satanic black metalers often perceive the war, death and anguish that result from racism and Nazism as happy accidents caused by a misguided and contemptible herd mentality.

NSBM, like Nazi punk, will continue to be marginalized from the main body of black metal culture until it is a separate scene altogether. Its intolerance of Satanism, unwillingness to

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[367] Maelstrom, Issue No. 14.
[368] Baddeley, Part Three, Chapter One.
[369] *Black Metal: A Documentary*.

embrace non-European audiences and inability to do business with mainstream record companies will continue to isolate NSBM and alienate the majority of black metal scene members. Black metal's generalized fascination with an imagined past and its hatred of modern secular culture will always lend itself to appropriation by far-right and racist groups and individuals, but its inherent contradictions and incompatibility with many of black metal's most cherished ideas will prevent it from gaining widespread popularity within the scene. Whatever transgressive power National Socialism might contain is outweighed by its unavoidable connection with modernity and herd mentality in ways that are very similar to black metal's critique of Christianity. National Socialism's attempt to reconcile the individual with the group is awkward and, to the vast majority of black metalers, unacceptable. Black metal seeks to create transgressive identities removed from both the modern era and constrictive notions of self and other. NSBM does not achieve this complex cultural and spiritual feat, usually falling back on tired notions of race and tradition that reassert the problematic aspects of modernity rather than reconciling them.

Conclusion: Let the Fires of Hell Touch the Sky

Black metal is an intensely active culture intended to inform and articulate identity more than to simply entertain. It is a way of looking at the world and a method for self-creation. As we have seen in the preceding chapters, there are numerous ways that black metalers utilize and construct their identities, but nearly all black metalers share a sincere belief in the corruption of modern culture and the necessity of escape and/or apocalypse. Black metal is not a political organization that seeks specific political alterations to the current system; it is an assertion that modern, secular, rational culture is essentially and necessarily sick and empty. Satanists seek the creation of a super-human self in order to annihilate or subjugate the modern world.[370] Asá Trǔ black metal hopes to revitalize the pre-Christian traditions of the Nordic countries in order to return to a vital, pre-modern past that participants feel was meaningful and empowering.[371] National Socialist Black Metal hopes to start a race war that will change the world and resolve the sense of disunity and alienation that participants experience.[372] In all of its forms and manifestations, black metal seeks to create an alternative to modernity and sweep away everything associated with the urban, Enlightenment-inspired, mundane world in which black metalers live.

The paradox between the hyper-individualism asserted by many influential black metalers and the pleasures of the group that black metal revels in is one of the major sites of activity within black metal culture. In many ways, this paradox is very much in keeping with black metal's animosity towards the discourses of modernity; how does modern man confront and contribute to the group? The contradiction between a black metaler who claims to be

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[370] Baddeley, Gavin. *Lucifer Rising*, Part Three, Chapter Four. 1999, Plexus Publishing.
[371] Gardell, Mattias. *Gods of the Blood*, Chapter Four. 2003, Duke University Press.
[372] Gardell, pg 307.

unbounded to any force beyond his own will and/or that of Satan, who is also part of a band and a scene, is constantly interrogated within black metal but can never be fully resolved. When I posed the issue of this paradox to a long-time black metal fan and journalist he stated:

> I think more and more black metal musicians are acutely aware of the scenario you allude to in the second part of your question. The answer of course, is that one CAN'T be an ultra-individualist in a band or scene. Which is probably why there have been so many one-man black metal bands (Xasthur, Leviathan, Crebain, Profundi, Krieg, Draugar, etc.) cropping up in the last decade.[373]

Black metal constantly negotiates this issue, attempting to resolve the contradiction through isolation, notions involving autonomous co-operation between scene members and, most notably, mystical experience. While the paradox between hyper-individualism and group identity can never be fully resolved, it is the discourse surrounding this contradiction that provides black metal with much of its meaning and pleasure.

The current Swedish black metal scene has a particularly ambitious and articulate understanding of mysticism and its validity to black metal. Many Swedish black metal bands, most notably Watain and Dissection, are affiliated with the Temple of the Black Light, or Misanthropic Luciferian Order as it is sometimes known, a Theistic, Gnostic, Satanic organization based in Sweden.[374] Little is known about the Temple of the Black Light, but the gist of their philosophy is that the human world is a prison created by a tyrannical God to enslave and subjugate humanity.[375] The Temple of the Black Light hopes, through magick and mysticism, to break into a chaos dimension that parallels our own in order to escape this prison; essentially, the very laws of physics and the natural world are oppressive and must be

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[373] 11-01-07
[374] www.templeoftheblacklight.net/main.html
[375] For an overview of The Temple of the Black Light's philosophy, see their website: www.templeoftheblacklight.net

destroyed.[376] This notion of the physical human world being essentially and irrevocably oppressive, and that the only admirable goal in this world is to escape and/or destroy it is a dramatic but significant assessment of black metal culture in a more general sense. The Temple of the Black Light, and those black metal bands affiliated with it, are extreme examples that prove the larger point: black metal does not seek to create an entertaining subculture that can be adapted to everyday life; black metal desires a dramatic reassessment of reality and what it means to be alive.

The desire for transcendence of the mundane through communion with the deity and the mystical experience links the various factions and interpretations of black metal culture together. Erik from the Swedish Temple of the Black Light affiliated black metal band Watain explains:

> Satanism is part of transcendence, the becoming; the start in a way is irrelevant as is the person. The only thing is that you never let anything block your path. When people ask and read these sort of questions they are probably looking for some sort of greasy details and sure I could give quite a quote but what I normally say is that if people are genuinely interested in Satanism and how the life of a Satanist looks there really is no other way to find out until you live that life yourself. If the line that people go for in Satanism is black metal, if that's how far their interest in the left hand path goes, fine but there is an abyss and you can step into it if you want. Instead of turning off the light at night and going to sleep you can actually go out and experience the night and do what you feel and that's it.[377]

Erik explains that Satanic black metal is essentially about transcendence, transformation and merging the individual with the "abyss." He assets that the participant's mundane identity, the identity that he or she had prior to their discovery of Satanism, is unimportant, that it is something to be overcome. This process of transformation, of overcoming one's humanity, is, as I have argued throughout this thesis, central to black metal culture.

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[376] www.templeoftheblacklight.net/library/chaosophy/chaosophy.html
[377] *MTUK Metal Zine*, 2007

It is significant that both Erik from Watain as well as co-authors Deleuze and Guattari use the term, "the becoming," to describe self-transformation and actualization.[378] Many black metalers feel that this process of becoming, of self-creation, is the focal point of their lives and artistic endeavors. Black metal, and popular culture in general, is a site of struggle; a place where meanings, identities and significance are created. However obscure, comical, repulsive or fanciful outside observers might find the assertions of black metalers, attempts on the part of black metalers to establish meaning and empowerment in their lives is a very real, creative, and active endeavor. Black metalers hope to create a new humanity that is more vital, animalistic and pleasurable than the examples they see around them in their everyday lives.

It is vital that scholars observe and attempt to understand the methods, representations and ideas created by black metalers, and other groups like them, in their attempts to establish unique identities and meanings in a postmodern world. Theorists like Jean Baudrillard argue that meaning is no longer possible in the contemporary world;[379] black metalers make rigorous attempts to create their own meanings in place of the empty signifiers that they see around them. This process of self-creation and the resurrection of meaning, is one of the primary functions of contemporary popular culture and black metal in particular. Black metalers might agree with Baudrillard's gloomy assessment of postmodern culture, but they do not resign themselves to it. Creation, redefinition and revitalization are at the heart of the black metal project. Nietzsche's famous pronouncement regarding humanity's murder of God sums up this perspective on the creation of meaning: "God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him. How shall we comfort ourselves, the murderers of all murderers? Is not the greatness of this deed too great for

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[378] Deleuze, Gilles and Guattari, Felix. *Capitalism and Schizophrenia: A Thousand Plateaus*, pg 250-251. 1987, the University of Minnesota Press.
[379] Baudrillard, Jean. *Simulacra and Simulations*. *Selected Writings*. 2001, Stanford University Press.

us? Must we ourselves not become gods simply to appear worthy of it?"[380] Nietzsche is, of course, not just speaking about the death of God, but the meaning and sense of purpose that God implies.

We have seen the numerous ways in which black metalers criticize, attack and attempt to modify the modern world. More significantly, we have observed the new identities, values and hopes for a new (or sometimes old) world that black metalers hope to replace modernity with. In the beginning of Chapter One, I posed the question: how did a country as wealthy, peaceful and stable as Norway produce a violent, devil worshipping heavy metal cult on this scale? The answer is that black metal emerged in Norway *because* of its wealth, peace and stability. Norway is perhaps the best example of the successful, stable, modern state; the embodiment of the mundanity, lack of meaning and purpose that black metalers feel is synonymous with contemporary culture. Norway offered black metalers a safe, comfortable, stable life; black metalers set fire to Norway's offer and tried to destroy everything associated with that safety and stability. Black Metalers found contemporary Norway, perhaps the greatest triumph of the modernist project, wholly unsatisfying and unacceptable. Black metal suggests a dramatic reevaluation of the self, other people and the basic nature of reality. Black metal defines itself in direct opposition to the stable modernity of contemporary Northern Europe. Turning contemporary values entirely on their head, black metal attempts to resolve the perceived inadequacies of modern identity, society and individuality. Through self-creation, transformation and transcendence of the mundane, black metalers are attempting to create their own meanings in a contemporary world that they feel is devoid of spiritual and cultural significance.

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[380] Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Gay Science, Section 125.* 1974, Vintage.

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